The Interpenetration of Buddhist Practice and Classroom Teaching

by

Michael Gayner

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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The Interpenetration of Buddhism and Teaching

Michael Gayner  
Doctor of Philosophy, 1999  
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Abstract

The central question posed in this thesis was whether there is an interpenetration of influences between the practice of Buddhism and teaching in a classroom at the elementary and high school levels; and if there is, what is the nature of that interpenetration. The question arose from the author’s experience as a Buddhist practitioner and a teacher. Anecdotal evidence and what little literature exists in the field suggested that influences do exist, and that spiritual practice in general, and Buddhism in particular, can be of assistance to teachers in their professional lives. However, no research had been carried out examining in detail the actual lived experience of teacher/practitioners. As was discussed in the narratives, the benefits were not limited to teaching alone, but rather helped to dissolve the conceptual barriers that segment life experience, thereby benefiting all aspects of life.

The narratives of the teacher/practitioners provided a rich and detailed description of the many ways the interpenetration manifests. The major themes included the centrality of the actual spiritual practices, along with other aspects of the teachers’ life experience which served to support the practices. Community,
study, facing professional challenges, and accepting and working with difficult life experiences were examples of some of the major supporting aspects.

Teaching was examined as a profession particularly suited to the application of spirituality. The unique responsibility of the profession, with all of the challenges involved in helping young people to grow and mature, was seen to lend itself to the fostering of states of mind and ways of relating to environments that are resonant with spirituality. The presence of both the challenges that demand compassion, gentleness, energy and many other qualities that were also be seen to be developed through spiritual practice, and of a professional tradition that helps support teachers in their development, was seen to make of teaching a good career for a spiritual practitioner.
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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is a study of the interpenetration of Buddhist practice and teaching. Interpenetration is the key word here, as it is not a one-way relationship where spiritual practice influences one's mundane life, but rather, there is an interplay between these two aspects of one's life, as well as every other activity in which one engages; in effect any separation is but a conceptual delineation of the continuum of experience that constitutes all of one’s life. The question that I am asking in this study is: whether there is an interpenetration of influences between the practice of Buddhism and teaching in a classroom at the elementary and high school levels; and if there is, what is the nature of that interpenetration. Specifically, I will examine the practices as experienced by classroom teachers in the Toronto region who are members of my sangha (the Sanskrit word for community of practitioners), and who were interviewed and observed over a period of two months.

The question of the study emerges from three interrelated contexts. The first is that increasingly, teachers are faced with complex and stressful situations in their classrooms for which the traditional pedagogical methods and approaches are inadequate. This problem is not only faced by teachers, but by society at large, and so the study, while ostensibly about teacher’s experience and Buddhism, has implications for the greater society. The second context is that there is a growing recognition that spiritual practices have the potential to be of assistance in helping address these problems, not only for teachers, but for anyone interested in taking up the committed, systematic practice of a spiritual tradition. The third context is that while anecdotal evidence and my personal experience suggests that such practices do, indeed, affect teachers, there is little
literature on the subject. Such literature as does exist will be discussed in chapters three, with some additional information in appendices I and II. Given the relative silence of the literature, this study is unique in that it examines one particular community of one lineage of a specific tradition. This research is done not with the aim of converting people to the tradition. Rather, through carefully contextualizing an in-depth analysis of the experiences of five teacher/practitioners from one tradition with a respectful attitude to other traditions, hopefully readers will see that not only is there a rich potential source of support, but also that there are many traditions through which to avail themselves of the benefits of spiritual practice.
In the introduction, I will discuss my reasons for carrying out the work and my intentions for the work itself, followed by a brief explanation of what my understanding of spiritual practice entails, and the distinction between spiritual practice and the general ways in which religions are taken up in the West. I will also address two of the myths prevalent in our society today which obscure people’s understanding of spirituality. I feel that these issues are important to address at this point, as they are common issues that arise in discussing the work, and dealing with them immediately will allow me to proceed directly to other issues. In the second chapter I will present my personal narrative as a teacher and a practitioner of Buddhism in order to ground the discussion immediately in an experiential context. The examples will also serve to make my position as a practitioner further evident to the reader.

In the third chapter, I will go into more detail regarding spirituality, specifically inter-spiritual dialogue, and the differences and similarities among various traditions. In that context, I will discuss some writers who have influenced my approach to spirituality and education. In chapter four I will present some of the tenets of Buddhism, outlining some key understandings of the mind and of the ways in which practice serves to assist the practitioner to work with the mind. This discussion will establish the vocabulary and background necessary to understand the teachers’ stories and the subsequent discussions in chapters five and six. In chapter five I will look at methodological issues, discussing the ways in which narrative as a methodology is particularly suited to this study, and also looking at ways in which Buddhist epistemology and ontology can extend the boundaries of narrative. Chapter six will be the
presentation of the narratives of the four teachers, and chapter seven the analysis.
Initial Clarifications

In my experience, spirituality is something that is considered by many people to possibly be a good thing, but not something that is really accessible or applicable to their lives. There are many preconceptions that people develop from sources as diverse as movies, the media and their exposure to religious practice in their youth or as adults visiting churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and shrines perhaps on a weekly basis, and often only for various cultural events and religio-cultural holidays such as Christmas. I would suggest that readers put on hold their preconceptions regarding religious practice and spirituality while they read this thesis and treat the material as something new, something which may involve a different view of both religion and spirituality than they are accustomed to.

In discussions with both academics and other people in my life, I have often found that in order to begin talking about the heart of the issue of the interpenetration of Buddhism and professional life, there are a series of building block concepts and perspectives about both spirituality in general - and more particularly to this thesis - Buddhism, that must be put in place. This will take place throughout the first four chapters as outlined above. It is my hope that through the gradual introduction of new elements in the presentation of spirituality, combined with some degree of restatement and reference to practices previously mentioned, the reader will have the time to integrate the terms and specific epistemological and ontological perspectives that assist the practices and are further clarified through them. I also hope that the somewhat ephemeral quality one might call the 'flavour' of the overall world view as found
in spiritual traditions in general, but mostly in that of Tibetan Buddhism, will be made more accessible.

**Proselytizing and the Aim of this Thesis**

The first issue that must be addressed is the intentions of this thesis. I do not believe that there is one particular tradition to which all people should adhere. While some might promote the view that there is one correct or universal religion, I am of the opinion that the histories and present day realities of societies and cultures, not to mention individuals, are far too complex and have such different needs and ways of making sense of the world, that one path, let alone one religion, could not possibly be appropriate for all. It is not my intention to convert anyone to a specific religion, or for that matter to try to convince people to join a religion at all, but rather to share the experiences of classroom teachers on spiritual paths.

Aside from a personal distaste for proselytizing, for the kind of spiritual journey that is under discussion here, a practitioner must come to the practices through her own inspiration. In my experience, that does not happen if someone attempts to talk the person into joining a religion or practicing meditation. The connection is more likely to occur if a practitioner lives their life as an example, and people who interact with them recognize something that they want or need. Furthermore, there are myriad cultural and individual differences that channel people’s interests and aspirations towards certain kinds of practices. In other words, I do not feel that everyone would benefit the most from joining my religion or my community. They may be better served through another group or through processes and practices which they develop on their own. Therefore, the structure of this thesis will not be in the form of an argument to convert
readers to Buddhism, but rather to simply share the experiences of classroom teachers who also practice a particular spiritual path. This intention is in keeping with the Dalai Lama's advice to a senior Western student: "Contribute to others, rather than converting others." (cited in Das, 1996). For these reasons, the stories that will be presented in the thesis will not be proselytizing in intention. Whatever inspiration arises, be it sympathy, curiosity, a sense of common purpose or the aspiration to explore the practices of a given tradition, would, in my opinion, signify success.

Perhaps the most important point which I hope will come out of the larger work will be a recognition that people who look to their religions for certain forms of guidance are able to tap into sources of wisdom and practices which can provide them with ways to move out of the present cultural and personal despair that seems more and more to beset modern societies (Berry, 1990; Macy, 1991; Miller, 1990). Teachers face over-crowded classrooms, complex teaching situations with students from radically different ethnic, cultural and educational backgrounds, and social and financial pressures from conservative governments. People in general, and teachers specifically, are finding their professional and personal lives to be more demanding as the issues they must address become more complex.

Examples of these problems abound, but in ongoing research on a separate project which I am conducting at schools in East Toronto, I have seen first-hand how teachers have to deal with students who are recent immigrants, sometimes with limited or no English and sometimes from countries torn apart by warfare. Their families have been split apart, sometimes for years, and there are cases in which family members have been lost. In other schools both in Toronto and throughout the world, teachers face growing rates of delinquency and crime with less money available for resources such as dominant culture
language instruction, special education and counseling. It is my opinion that spiritual practices, while helpful for anyone interested in understanding their existence, and the working of their mind and their environment, could be of invaluable practical assistance for teachers facing the new difficulties that have arisen over the last decades.

Spirituality: Practice, Contemplation and Daily Practice

The next step that needs to taken is to explain a few of the significant terms used in this thesis, and in so doing, begin to define spirituality. (There is also a glossary of terms included in the appendix) As spirituality in general and Buddhism in particular often make use of words from languages other than English, and sometimes use English words with quite specific nuances, there will be many terms which arise in the discussions of spirituality, as well as in the discussion of the narratives. They will be defined in context when appropriate. However, it is helpful to establish an immediate understanding of the ways in which I am using the terms 'practice', 'contemplation' and 'spirituality'.

The term 'practice' is used to indicate the actual disciplines or techniques that are carried out on a spiritual path and includes a vast array of meditative practices including sometimes the act of contemplation. Miller defines contemplation as "...involv[ing] the development of compassionate attention" (Miller, 1994, p. 2). One description of spirituality is given by Clive Beck: "Spirituality includes any path which develops characteristics such as: awareness, breadth of outlook, a holistic outlook, integration, wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, detachment, acceptance, love and gentleness" (Beck, 1986, p. 151). I would add to this list the importance of a sense of humour and of clarity (Trungpa, 1973; Spretnak, 1991), and also add that the phrase 'such as' is
important to bear in mind. This is because spirituality can not be pinned down to a list of characteristics that one can simply check off, thereby defining and limiting the parameters of valid spiritual paths.

Both Beck and Miller have purposely not limited their definitions to the major religions, but have included any paths that promote those characteristics. However, I would propose that religions are of special significance to the study of spiritual and contemplative practices as religions are - among many other things - storehouses of techniques developed by people on spiritual journeys (Smith, 1965). In other words, spirituality, as I understand Smith to be using the term, is a multi-faceted journey characterized by the disciplined use of techniques or practices which work with conditions and characteristics specific to each individual. Furthermore, if used properly, these techniques can be of assistance to anybody with the proper guidance.

There is a distinction that I would like to draw regarding spiritual practice that is somewhat delicate. I am interested in spiritual practices that are actual disciplines, that are engaged with as a journey and which influence one’s life in every moment - or at least where there is the goal to integrate the practices to that extent. Parker Palmer identifies the same issue when he says that he is opposed to vocal prayer in schools, but calls for “…a mode of knowing and education that is prayerful through and through. What do I mean by prayer? I mean the practice of relatedness.” (Palmer, 1993, p. 11). For Palmer, prayer represents a state of being that is profoundly aware of the interconnections of all life, and involves a process of coming to recognize that interconnectedness. The key point for me is the stress on the process or actual practices that are carried out that are at the heart of spirituality. With this focus in mind, I will look at practices that are not simply something that is done on Sunday or Friday or on
special holidays and then put away until the next time one is in a temple, shrine room, church or synagogue.

I am not saying that there is anything wrong with engaging with religions in that manner; it can be of great comfort and help for many people and is often a central gathering point for communities. Most importantly, it can provide a vehicle for instilling the same values and ways of being that consistent practice of spiritual disciplines seek to instill, and furthermore, can be a powerful place to put them into practice. However, in my experience, meditative practices do take discipline, and demand some form of consistent practice, at best on a daily basis, sometimes for periods of several hours a day. In Miller's words, a practitioner is involved in meditative practice "...not just on Sunday but every day, or ideally every moment, as a vehicle for awakening." (Miller, 1988, p. 129).

I do not want to delineate all of the practices - that would be an enormous list. Some form of breath meditation is a common starting point in one form or another, but there are other practices such as visualization, mantras, yogic practices, sweat lodges, fire ceremonies and many more. For the purposes of this thesis, the practices which will be described are the ones that the participants have carried out, and which arose in the interviews as having been influential in their lives.
Hollywood Epiphanies, Bliss and the Nitty-Gritty

The last step necessary at this point is to address two of the myths that tend to exist about spiritual practice prevalent in the modern Western view of spirituality. The first is the media presentation of epiphanic moments of spiritual insight leading to some kind of all-encompassing solution to life problems. In my experience this does not happen. In fact I have never met anyone to whom this has happened, regardless of the tradition they were a part of. It is my experience, as well as that of other practitioners I have spoken with, that it is much more likely that one becomes more familiar with one's patterns - so much so that the unending experience of seeing oneself acting out the same ego-based habitual patterns of greed, aggression and ignorance - to name one core description of the basic emotional responses - becomes incredibly frustrating. Eventually this frustration and almost nauseating regularity combine with a sense of empowerment from applying specific antidotes to the habitual responses. When one is able to wake up to their functioning, the link between the emotional needs which give rise to the actions in the first place begin to be superseded by the joy or tranquillity of the disciplined response possible when the practices are applied. However, this is not an easy thing to explain intellectually.

There is a second myth about spiritual practice which is that the aim is to achieve some kind of trance wherein everything is blissful and there are no thoughts or emotions other than this bliss state. Whether or not there may be such an experience at some points along a practitioner's journey, the vast majority of time spent in mediation usually involves coming back from discursively floating about in thoughts that meander through memories, fantasies and mundanities about dinner, the weather, clothing, and often intense emotions such as anger and passion. This experience - of the unending
discursiveness of mind that is experienced when meditating - is hard to have unless one meditates, as there are very few moments in life when there is not only no object of focus for the mind other than the mind itself, but also where the manner of contemplation or attention is not to think about the mind, but to experience it without commentary.
Summary

In this introduction I have laid out the thesis question: an exploration of the nature of the interpenetration of involvement in Buddhist practice and classroom teaching. I made the point that the aim of the thesis is not to attempt to talk anyone into joining a particular religion, but rather, through a detailed exploration of the spiritual practices of five teacher/practitioners including myself, to propose that engagement with spiritual practice in many different forms can be a source of support for teachers facing challenging situations. By extension, this same benefit would be available to anyone in society, regardless of their profession.

In order to clarify the approach to the study, I addressed some issues that commonly arise in discussions with people unfamiliar with spiritual practice. The first issue was the difference between spirituality and the weekly attendance of religious services. The distinction was not made in order to put down that form of engagement, but rather to clarify the degree of commitment necessary for the journey. The second issue was to address two common misconceptions about spiritual practice, namely the easy and dramatic achievement of epiphanies as portrayed in media such as Hollywood films, and the common notion that the practices are aimed at achieving some form of world-evading bliss.

With these initial clarifications established, it is now time to present my narrative as a teacher and a Buddhist in order to suggest some ways that spirituality can enter one’s life and be of assistance.
Chapter Two: Personal Narrative

Introduction

In this chapter, I will first present the story of my journey from my early family experiences through to becoming a new practitioner of Buddhism, and the sectarian views that I held in the early days of my interest in spiritual practice, through to my development of a more inclusive and pluralistic appreciation of the power of spiritual practice in other traditions. The narrative will also mirror the first sections of each of the narratives by blending my spiritual history with that of the development of my interest in, and practice of, teaching. In the next section of the narrative, I will present some ways in which my involvement in Buddhism has influenced my teaching. This early placement of my personal narrative in the thesis will, I hope serve two purposes. The first is to help the reader to understand what it is that attracts me to Buddhism - the ways in which Buddhist practice helps me to work with my mind and my general experience. The second purpose is that as a narrative thesis, it is helpful to provide the reader with a sense of who I am so that both the insights and biases that I have will be more explicit.
Roman Catholic Youth to a Teacher who is Buddhist

I was brought up as a Roman Catholic, taking first communion, serving as an altar boy with my brother and receiving what I think was a fairly standard Roman Catholic upbringing. My family went through different degrees of regularity in church going, but for the majority of my childhood, we went to church every Sunday and on the major holidays. The priest would sometimes visit our home, and I have memories of sitting down to dinner with the parish priest from the church in Ottawa to which we belonged from 1973 to 1976. As a graduate of a Jesuit high school, my father had received an excellent education, not only in the traditional academic disciplines, but also in his Roman Catholicism. My mother was brought up a Protestant, but had converted in order to marry my father. Conversion, as I was later to experience myself, brings with it a mature exploration of the new tradition which is sometimes lacking in the religious training of people born into the tradition. In my family, both of my parents had opportunities to explore their faith: as an adult in my mother’s case, and as a young adult in my father’s case.

As my father was a diplomat, up until I was in late elementary school my brother and sister and I attended schools around the world, in places as far flung as New Zealand and the Soviet Union. Our education was usually in secular schools, although I did attend a Roman Catholic school in New Zealand for a year and one in Saskatoon for another year in 1969. After my family moved back to Canada in 1973, we first attended public schools while my parents were still living in Canada. After my father was posted to Iraq in 1976, we attended high school at boarding schools in Ontario which were affiliated with Anglican Protestantism. It was my experience, and apparently that of my siblings as well,
that the religious experience was limited in those environments. Although there was a morning chapel service everyday other than Saturday, there was nothing particularly spiritual associated with the experience of morning chapel, or the Sunday service.

My experience at the private boarding school I attended was significant in other ways though - ways that I feel laid the ground for my future interest in Buddhism. I first entered the school in grade ten, and had difficulty fitting in. There were a number of reasons for this - I had been overseas for many of my formative years and didn’t know the social codes for that age group, but fundamentally, I simply wanted attention and didn’t know how to get it in a socially acceptable way. The upshot of this was that I was ostracized and picked-on by my peers through the first term of grade ten. Things came to a head in the winter term, and I eventually came to the painful realization that either the world was messed-up - as I put it to myself at the time - or I was. It seemed more intelligent at the time to see the world and my peers as being more together, and so I began a process of learning to read my environment for clues as to how I should live and relate with people. Essentially, I was forced into a kind of self-awareness that I was not ready for, and yet which was absolutely necessary at the time if I was to survive what was a vicious environment.

As the years went by, I developed a fine tuned sense of how to read people and quickly ascertain what they wanted from me. My relationships with my peers improved, aided by involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities. However, there was still some baggage from the first painful year with nicknames that were difficult to shake, and a nebulous sense that there was always a threat to my hard earned social acceptance. When I eventually went to the University of Toronto in 1980, I was finally free of the painful history - at least in that no one knew about it. However, I was still depending on my ability
to read people in order to get along. At university, I was overjoyed to find that I was able to easily fit in and my social life became one of the major focuses of my life. It was also at that I began to think about spirituality.

After spending a year reveling in the joys of social acceptance, I began to feel that there was something missing. I started to question the lack of a central moral and social compass, and my dependence on others for establishing how to act. My social antennae were virtually instinctive by then, and I could not understand how to let go of that level of awareness. It was also during the university period that I had my first experience of teaching. I took a year off starting in the summer of 1982 after a disastrous second year at university, and decided that I did not want to return until I had found something that I could put my heart into studying. I joined the Canadian reserves and over two summers did the regular army officer training at CFB Gagetown in New Brunswick. During the year, I served as a platoon commander with the Queen's Own Rifles, an infantry regiment in Toronto. In that role, I taught various military skills to my platoon such as tactics, physical training, drill and weapons handling.

I found that the teaching aspect of the job was one of the most enjoyable parts of being in the military, although I also enjoyed the camaraderie and the adventurous, outdoors side of military life. Somehow, it never seemed as if what we were doing was really training to actually have to shoot someone, and my experience was more of a kind of subsidized camping and extension of the war games I had played as a child. One of the nicknames that I got while in officer training was “Bing” as my friends felt that I looked more like Bing Crosby out hunting pheasants than a killer of men. Toward the end of my time in the military I began to study T'ai Chi, and on the advice of my T'ai Chi teacher, I read a Taoist text called the “Tao Te Ching”, also know as the “Lao Tsu”.


I was powerfully effected by the wisdom of the text and began to read everything I could find on Taoism to discover how one could train to experience the world in the way it seemed the Taoist masters experienced the world. What the Taoists seemed to have was an ability to understand how they appeared to others without getting lost in that understanding. In other words, their actions were not based on other's opinions and desires, but on how best to help themselves and others to develop compassion and insight into their lives. While this may not seem revolutionary to some, for me it was the first time I had read anything that spoke to the core issues in my life. Eventually my readings lead me to Zen Buddhism where I first encountered the possibility of a path with specific disciplines, the practice of which would help me to develop a way of being that I had first read of in the "Tao Te Ching". My readings lead me to Zen Buddhism where the centrality of spiritual practice - in this case zazen and koan practice - is stressed. At that point I realized that what I needed was to receive meditation instruction and to start practicing. As it turned out, a friend of mine at university was a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism which I had previously thought was a form of Buddhism that lacked the clarity, simplicity and rigour of Zen. However, after many conversations, I came to see that perhaps the rich panoply of deities and the array of practices was more than just another form of theism with another set of beliefs that had to be adopted. I attended a weekend program introducing the practice of meditation at the center he belonged to and felt an immediate affinity for the environment and the people there. After some years I eventually became a member and to this day continue to practice with the community. It was then that I decided to return to university to study Buddhism and religions in general, while at the same time I immersed myself in the practices and teachings of Buddhism.
In 1985 I finished my B.A. and spent a year as an advertising account executive in Montreal. Unfortunately, the company went out of business, and I half-jokingly took the event as a message that business was not for me. I thought that I would study psychotherapy at the Naropa Institute, a post-secondary Institute founded by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of my Buddhist community. The only problem was that as a private institution, the fees were more than I could afford, and so I did what many fresh graduates from university did at that time, and went to Japan to teach English, thinking that I would be there for a year and make enough money to pay the fees at Naropa. Things did not turn out quite that way as I stayed there for four years, and I was somewhat surprised to find that I loved teaching. Although I had enjoyed the teaching in the military, the whole experience of being in the army was such that no one part stood out that strongly at the time in my mind, although in retrospect, I can see that, as I stated above, the teaching was one of the high points. What I discovered in Japan was that as a profession, teaching provided a rich diversity of experiences. There were the joys of bringing a new class into the college I taught at, and then seeing them graduate two years later. Most importantly, I began to develop a confidence that was based on professional competency and a way of engaging with the world that was not based on being liked, but on acting according to what the situation required in order to best promote the learning environment. I found that my practice of meditation helped build on the finely tuned sense of awareness of others' desires and needs, while at the same time developing the spaciousness and clarity to see that arising of my deep-seated need for respect and affection that had driven me in high school and university. It was not that the needs went away, but rather that I was able to work with them and develop the gentleness and confidence to continue
to work with my mind even when I found myself being driven by these old needs.

As my teaching developed, so did my Japanese language skills, and I became a home room teacher, sometimes dealing with the students in Japanese, and working with personal as well as academic issues. The amount of affection and in fact love that came to mark the relationships with my students was an amazing experience, and I considered myself fortunate to have found a job where not only could I do something I found interesting, but I felt I was able to genuinely help people simply as a result of being in a helping profession. At the same time, my study of Buddhism was progressing, and I found that teaching was a great place to practice and apply the teachings, as I described previous chapter. That is not to say that everything was easy, as there was a steep learning curve from being someone who had only taught in the military, to teaching English as a Second Language at a two year college in Japan. However, between the students, and my colleagues - some of whom I am still in contact with after being away from Japan for seven years - I never had a complete disaster, and after a time I found that the feedback I was getting was that I was a good teacher.

I also found that my teaching developed through some of the examples of my teachers. I studied a number of Japanese traditions such as shiatsu, tea ceremony, aikido (a martial art) and shakuhachi (a Japanese flute), and found that the teachers were incredible. One of the interesting things was that each had their own styles and strengths, be it the incredible mixture of strength and gentleness in the woman who was my tea ceremony teacher, or the vibrant compassion and physical prowess of my Aikido teacher who was also a Zen priest. I will use him as an example, as he still epitomizes for me the essence of a teacher.
His compassion and energy coupled with his extraordinary prowess in martial arts was inspirational. Through his example, I identified some of what for me are important qualities in a good teacher. One quality is the area of the general skills of teaching. They include the ability to transmit one’s own passion without overwhelming or trying to control the student, but rather by allowing them to develop their own passion and experience. Another is the need for mastery in the discipline being taught. This leads to the confidence to accept challenges and any problems that may arise, without being defensive. He also had a quality of being present to everyone in the dojo or training hall. No matter what he was doing, I always felt that there was some form of connection that he maintained through his awareness, the proof of which was that when I would start to butcher a technique, he would soon be there to set me straight. Since then, I have always tried to maintain an environmental awareness of the students and the environment in which I am teaching, and to ensure that each student knew I was aware of them and concerned about their state of mind and their activities and progress.

After four years I decided that although I loved teaching and enjoyed my life there, I did not want to be an ESL teacher all my life. I decided to return to Canada to study teaching at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. However, before I went home, I traveled to Shanghai where I studied Tai Ch’i for half a year. My Tai Ch’i master was a Buddhist practitioner who brought the energy work of that martial art to his practice of Buddhism. He was a gentle and inspirational man who had spent seven years of the cultural revolution in jail, often chained so that he could not practice Tai Ch’i. During that period, he practiced in his mind through visualization. Despite the hardships he had faced, he embodied compassion not only to his students, but also to those who had harmed him. He said that China was a good place to practice Buddhism as there
were constantly opportunities to see the fruition of one's practice through the many possibilities to extend compassion to people who were creating obstacles and pain in one's life. From him I had my first systematic education concerning the development and use of "chi" or energy. Although I had a black belt in Aikido, he could lay his hand gently on my arm and send me flying. While I had been open to the possibility, I now saw that there really were aspects to the world that we have no knowledge of, but that open up through training. The experience of cleaning and opening the meridians along which chi flows is incredible. With my teacher, the process involved working with all aspects of one's life including eating, sleeping, how we related with others and how we related to ourselves. When this comes together, many experiences can arise, from equanimity and spaciousness to boundless energy - a feeling as if the sun were coming up in one's body. The main point of the description is that I developed a sense of the possibilities that could arise with sufficient dedication and training, combined with an attitude of compassionate openness as exemplified by my teacher.

In 1992, after half a year in Shanghai, it was time to return to Canada and to school. I have been at OISE since then, studying various pedagogical approaches, research methodologies and related issues. During this period, I have also become more involved with my sangha. I have taught courses in Buddhist practice and philosophy, and helped in administration both locally and to some extent internationally. Some of the happiest times over the last seven years have been periods I have spent at meditation centers run by my sangha in Colorado, Vermont and Nova Scotia. I spent three months at a group retreat program where I was introduced to the tantric practices, and shorter periods either in solitary or group retreats. My practice is not consistent yet, but rather seems to follow cyclical patterns where I will practice regularly for a period of
months or a year, and then there will be a period of non-practice. This cycle is growing less dramatic, and I am working to stabilize and regularize my practice. I have found that when I practice, I can more effectively accomplish the other activities in my life, but nonetheless, I still occasionally lose the discipline and inspiration necessary to carry out the lengthy two and three hours practice sessions that tantric practices require.

Another important aspect of the last seven years has been regular teaching during the summers that I have not spent at meditation centers. I have taught intensive ESL programs for four of the seven summers, and they have been very helpful not only as a break from university studies, but also to reconnect with the main reason I am at OISE - my love for teaching. Furthermore, these programs have given me opportunities to examine my ability to apply my Buddhist practice to my teaching, which has in turn confirmed my sense that spiritual practice can be of benefit to teachers. At the same time, co-workers who are members of other traditions have inspired me with the ways in which their spiritual journeys inform and infuse their teaching with the same qualities that I seek to bring to my teaching.

This last point is a good lead-in to the final point I wish to make in this section. When I first became a Buddhist, and in fact in some ways even while I was first at OISE, like many converts, my zeal for my adopted tradition included a substantial amount of bigotry and pride. I felt that this tradition had a lock on truth, and that while others might have some insight into the nature of reality and the ways in which one could best understand existence and work with one’s experience, they were but partial understandings. In retrospect I can see that a part of this was trying to convince myself that I had made the right decision. Often when I read dharma teachings, I would have an awareness of how I could
use the material to defeat others in argument, and I grew somewhat arrogant about my newly forming prowess.

When discussing spirituality with others, my aim was to convince them that I was right, rather than to have a meeting of minds and hearts. I can still feel this energy inside when I speak with people from other traditions, but I hope I can say that the recognition of the drive has helped me to work with it. I find that when it arises I am usually able to see it for what it is, accept it as a part of my particular mix of neuroses and sanity, and then let the intensity of the emotional response dissipate and eventually disappear. Furthermore, through working with and lessening the drive to convince and win, conversations are much more interesting and less burdened with the competitive, claustrophobic heaviness that comes with an attachment to a set outcome.

The approach presented above to inter-spiritual encounter has an interesting position in my sangha. Historically, my sangha had a reputation for arrogance in its relationships with other communities. We felt we had some special spiritual “goodies” as we were being introduced to the tantric practices of Tibetan Buddhism. I have heard from members of other sanghas - not only of Theravadin and Mahayana Buddhism, but also other Tibetan sanghas - and from members of my sangha, that this arrogance manifested in an attitude where outsiders felt patronized and dismissed.

Whatever historical reasons may have existed for the development of this attitudes, things began to change with the introduction of the Shambhala teachings in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. Shambhala training is a secular approach to spirituality wherein one can learn to meditate without having to become a Buddhist. There has been, and continues to be, a debate about just how secular the tradition is, but to some degree the proof lies in the fact that there are people who are members of other religions such as Judaism and Christianity,
who also practice the various meditative disciplines taught in Shambhala Training. I have a very powerful memory of a Rabbi celebrating the Seder at a ten day retreat program called Kalapa Assembly. There was quite a substantial gathering at the Seder and no one left without having been deeply effected by the powerful uplifting joy expressed through the celebration. I present this example as an expression of the openness and inclusiveness of the tradition which has done much to alleviate the early arrogance of our sangha. Over the past two decades Shambhala Training and the Buddhist path have been parallel traditions, equally valued in the community. And while some members associate themselves with only one of the two paths, most partake of both. Furthermore, it is not seen as a problem if one decides to associate with only one, but rather support is given to whatever aspiration and practices one carries out.

The issue of aspiration is quite important in here. The aims of Buddhism and the means to achieve those aims will be discussed in the next chapter. However at this point it is useful to note that in Shambhala Training, the goal of the tradition is to promote enlightened society as a whole. The emphasis is not on attracting members so that there can be an enlightened society of people all practicing the disciplines presented in my sangha, but rather to connect with the wisdom and sanity of people, whatever their affiliations or lack of affiliations. That said, there are programs which are advertised, and there is a sense of being happy when people attend the training and become members of the sangha. However, more and more these days there is an emphasis on connecting with people on their own terms, and rather than trying to bring them into the sangha, going out to work with them in society and connecting with their aspirations and abilities. Examples of this are growing in Halifax where the sangha is headquartered and members of the sangha work in areas ranging from the arts to businesses, environmental organizations, teaching in the public system at all
levels from kindergarten to university, as well as an elementary and high school founded by members of the sangha and run on principles arisen from the vision of creating enlightened society.

Connections exist throughout the sangha internationally as well, for example with members working with native organizations in health care and education in both Canada and the United States. At the Naropa Institute, mentioned above, the administration and faculty include Buddhists as well as Christians, Jews and people from other traditions. All this is to say that while sangha members continue to be committed to their Buddhist practices and the practices of the Shambhala tradition, and one might say proud of the integrity and efforts of the community as a whole, there is a definite appreciation of the power and depth of other traditions as well. It is this spirit that I bring to this thesis and which I will bring to any work in the future. It is now time to develop this theme of inter-spiritual dialogue as the first step in laying out my understanding of spirituality.
Personal Examples of the Interpenetration of Spirituality and Teaching

I will now briefly describe some significant aspects of my experience of the interpenetration of my spiritual practice and my practice of teaching. The first aspect is a general sense of spaciousness that arises from meditation practice. From slowing down the mental processes and observing the ways in which my mind is constantly creating new thoughts, feelings, projections, interpretations and other mental phenomena, I have found that there is a sense of spaciousness that informs my relationships with the world and my experience of myself.

This is not to say that I go through life with glacial slowness, but rather that after a thought occurs there is more potential for me to be aware of the thought rather than reifying it as true or real. Perhaps most importantly, the thoughts simply lose some of their erstwhile solidity and I am aware of a range of possible actions, not the least of which is pausing to take stock of the situation and apply a practice to help generate a response that works to bring out the best in everyone involved. I have a greater potential to see the conditioned nature of the mental phenomena, be it an emotion, a theory or some other habitual response. I am not saying that I am always able to make use of this potential, but rather that through training I am in a better position to do so than I would be if I didn’t practice meditation. Everyone has this potential and in fact makes use of it, otherwise people would exist in a frozen mental landscape wherein there would be no possibility for working with emotions or thoughts at all. It would be as if an experience of anger, jealousy or a theory, once experienced, were immutable and true every time. Buddhist practice has helped me to work with this potential, and this basis allows a number of other possibilities to occur.
One of these is a sense of commitment to teaching and to the people in the teaching situations. When I am able to relate to situations with the above described sense of spaciousness, I tend to feel more curiosity. With less of a reified inner and outer landscape, there is more to be curious about. What in my experience is a heavy, claustrophobic feeling that comes from solidifying my projections about my existence, dissolves, and a feeling of freshness and curiosity arises. Situations draw me into them as I experience their ever-changing texture. I tend to see the humour in things, often the humour of seeing my own habitual patterns re-establishing their power over my experience, only to have some event wake me up to the freshness of direct experience. This can be embarrassing, but if I manage to stay with the embarrassment there is usually a sense of “oh this again” which is quite amusing. This is particularly helpful when the habitual patterns involve experiences such as laziness and frustration.

Locking horns with laziness and frustration can itself merely pump more energy into them. If I am frustrated that a lesson is not working or that a student is consistently not doing their homework, or if I am bored or tired and not interested in working on a lesson plan, just trying to ‘muscle’ through the feelings using will-power is not necessarily the most effective response. While it is recognized in Buddhism that it is necessary to have a sense of discipline and exertion, it is also very helpful to take a moment to step back from struggling with the situation and simply observe what is happening. There are specific practices that help effect such an experience. In the narrative and discussion chapters, these practices will be discussed and grounded in actual events. For now I will just mention them by way of examples.

One practice is called raising windhorse. This involves a short mantra with corresponding physical yoga which can take only a few seconds. Through this practice one radiates energy outward after having raised one’s own energy. My
experience of this practice is that it can cut the solidity of even the most intense negativity or sense of being trapped in painful mind-states. Another practice is tonglen wherein one takes in other’s pain and gives out a sense of calm soothing tranquillity. Regardless of whether one is actually able to have a direct effect on someone else through the practice, it is my experience that putting other’s welfare first, and in so doing subverting the habitual pattern of thinking of oneself first, helps me to relate with situations in a more compassionate manner. Thus I am able to continue working with myself and others.

As a beginning teacher, when I found myself in a difficult situation - a student challenging my sense of what should happen, or a student being rude or belligerent - I felt claustrophobic and driven to solve the situation while in panic mode. This usually led to direct conflict and the pulling of rank: “I’m the teacher and you will obey me.” When challenged, I felt as if not only my position was being challenged, but also my sense of who I was. I was the teacher and I was being paid to ensure that the class ran well. I also had an image of myself as able to run the show which included aspects of showmanship, of power, of being a likable person, etc. Through meditation practice and the sense of spaciousness that comes with it, I saw that much of what I was defending were projections that my environment and I had created, and that my fear driven reaction was a reflection of my attachment to those projections. At the same time, while being challenged I was able to bring the sense of spaciousness to the situation. Thus I was able to recognize the constructed nature of the image and to allow my reaction to be motivated by what I considered to be the best way to work with the situation so that it became one in which everyone grew and learned.

Through the study of Buddhist teachings, I was able to refine this experience and use it more skillfully. An example of such an application is the understanding of the mind found in the mandala of the five Buddha families.
(Trungpa, 1991, p. 75). They are the vajra, ratna, padma, karma and Buddha families. Essentially, the families are a matrix for examining the emotional states that humans move through. Each family is associated with a set of emotions which have a neurotic manifestation as well as an enlightened one. Any individual experiences all five of the families to some extent, however, each person tends to manifest more of certain ones than others. For example, vajra is associated with anger arising in defence of one's constructed ego. The mental energy used in the anger response can be transmuted into an experience of clarity and wisdom. There are specific practices called maitri training which, through the use of colours and yogic postures associated with the mental states, evoke intensified experiences of the energy in both the neurotic and enlightened manifestations. These practices are carried out in protected environments wherein one is able to explore the states of mind, thereby growing familiar with their minute nuances as the emotions flicker through conditions of greater and lesser solidity and workability. Through this training, I have found that in situations in life when strong emotions begin to overwhelm me, I am more familiar with how they function and therefore better able to use the energy productively without lashing out in anger, jealousy, greed, etc.

In a curriculum situation, I would take into account the tendencies of the individuals as well as my own, and try to work with the overall situation. I have found that when someone is reacting in anger, I stand a better chance of relating to the situation without getting caught up in either their anger or my response to it. I could talk with the student or to myself if it was my anger, and draw out the cause of the anger. What had given rise to the feeling? What was accurate and what was the feeling escalating and feeding on other projections that it magnetized? The spaciousness developed through meditation combined with study of the nature of mind, which fed back into the teaching situations and
which in turn provided opportunities to apply the teachings and practices. Through not solidifying myself, my projections or those of others, I believe I have become a more sensitive teacher, able to respond creatively to my own needs as well as those of my students and colleagues.

One further example of the above is working with diversity. As an ESL teacher I have taught students from Asia, Europe, Africa and various parts of North America, often in classes that contained students from countries and regions that had extremely difficult if not bloody relations with each other. Being able to work with this kind of diversity and still teach is quite a challenge - a challenge that teachers such as my participants in Toronto are facing more and more every year. The ability to understand age-old animosity and resentment, and the experience of cultural dissonances and other manifestations of diversity, is in my experience aided by the practices I have described above. They are not enough in themselves, but provide what I have found to be invaluable assistance in working with challenging situations. The practices are not solutions to the challenges of creating productive and enjoyable earning environments. The need for professionalism, for developing the pedagogic skills and the subject expertise is still necessary to be a good teacher. The practices work to assist the implementation of these essential skills and to help teachers work with the broad range of complex situations that arise in schools and the emotional states that are a part of those situations.

Finally, I would like to add that the relationship is definitely two-way. Teaching is an extremely challenging and rewarding profession. I am constantly able to experience my mind in direct and sometimes emotionally charged situations. Being in a position to apply the practices in such an environment has made the teachings and practices of Buddhism real for me. The use of the word 'practice' as a synonym for meditation is significant. Meditation is not an end in
itself, but rather, practice for being with others. This is not quite that simple in that one is never really alone in meditation, in that the thoughts and feelings about situations with others constantly emerge during meditation. The practices are not to be related to as an escape from the world, but rather as practice for being fully in the world. Teaching is a wonderful crucible for doing just that. The joys and difficulties of teaching are some of the most intense I have experienced. Thus it corresponds that in teaching, the potential for exploring my relationship with my own mind and with my environment in the most inclusive sense of the word is equally fecund.
Summary

In this chapter I have presented my narrative as a practitioner and as a teacher. Through so doing, I hope a sense of my spiritual and professional history will assist the reader in understanding this thesis through making my understanding of Buddhism and my connection with teaching explicit. I invite the reader to take into account my interests in their interpretation of the later chapters, especially the narratives and analysis. In support of this goal, I also presented some ways in which I feel I have benefited from my involvement. While it was not an exhaustive description of all of the ways I experience the benefits, I feel that it is enough to provide the reader with a sense of why I am interested in the topic, and why I wanted to carry out this research.
Chapter Three: Spirituality and Education

Introduction

In "Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century" by Edmund O'Sullivan, modern Westerners are described as living in a state of autism (O'Sullivan, 1999). Busy lives in a society where the average person has to work harder than before for a lower standard of living, rapid-fire advertising, the sense of the overwhelming nature of problems such as environmental degradation, ethnic strife and the growing gulf between rich and poor, along with the resultant feeling of despair; these are only a few examples of the forces that exist in society that promote the shutting down of our awareness and thus of our ability to address the problems that surround us. It is my belief that the spiritual traditions of the world are storehouses of practices that can combat this autism. Parker Palmer makes the same point in his book: "To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey". In the second edition, he identifies what he sees as the main reason that there has been so much interest in his book. That reason he gives is that "Educators of all sorts are in real pain these days, and that pain has compelled them to explore unconventional resources." (Palmer, 1993, p. IV). By unconventional resources, he means spiritual practice.

In this chapter, I will discuss a number of issues relating to spirituality and education in preparation for both a presentation of the Buddhist teachings necessary for the methodology chapter, and in order to begin presenting the vocabulary and world view necessary to understand the teachers' stories found in the narrative and analysis chapters. The discussion of spirituality is necessary
to establish the common ground upon which I believe a spiritual approach to life is based. I feel that there are a number of purposes served through this. Firstly, it is necessary in order to make clear the reasons for my expressed aim of not making of this thesis a proselytizing attempt to convince the reader that Buddhism is the most effective vehicle for working with one's life. Secondly, I do have biases that arise from my experience of Buddhist spiritual practice which influence my understanding of spirituality. I want to make them as clear as possible to the reader without having to preface every statement with the caveat that in some other tradition, there may be a different and equally powerful way to approach the same issues.

It cannot be denied that there are substantial differences between the world's spiritual traditions in both the nature of the practices and in the statements regarding doctrine such as the existence or non-existence of a deity. I do not want to sweep these under the carpet in order to construct a picture of similarities like some kind of academic Beneton advertisement wherein if only people were willing to think about things in a certain way and deny the complexities, they would find that we are all the same under the quaint, surface differences. However, as I will discuss, there are also essential similarities among the practices and the results of the practices which manifest in practitioners who have immersed themselves in their traditions. It does a disservice to the universality that manifests as this fruition as well as the splendour of the many forms of worship and practice, if one leaps to a fuzzy assumption of either sameness or uniqueness. Instead I would propose that in the case of this thesis, the most fruitful approach is to make my understanding of spirituality clear, recognizing that as a Buddhist I have certain biases as well as certain insights, all of which I hope readers will be able to contemplate through the lenses of their own insight and experience.
Spiritual practices can be so simple that practitioners spend lifetimes learning to not complicate the process of just being. At the same time, they can be incredibly complex, necessitating clear and systematic intellectual and experiential understandings of epistemological and ontological world views. That there are differences need not be a cause for dismissing them en masse, but rather, something to contemplate and marvel at when one experiences the depth of understanding, compassion and profundity as personified in someone who has been immersed in their tradition long enough to begin the transformations that long-time practitioners recognize in each other as the marks of practice.

With the above in mind, this chapter will proceed through the following stages. Building on the discussion of the ecumenical flavour of the Shambhala teachings and further explaining my desire not to try to convert anyone, I will first present what I consider to be a useful approach to inter-spiritual dialogue based on the work of Diana Eck as she proposed in her book: “Encountering God: a Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Benaras” (Eck, 1993), and Charlene Spretnak in her book: “States of Grace” (Spretnak, 1991). I will then discuss what I see as the common ground of spiritual practice. In the next section, I will present some examples of writers and practitioners from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions who have influenced my intellectual and spiritual development, as well as my approach to spirituality and education. (For a brief discussion of some spiritually oriented schools and conferences on spirituality in education, please see appendix I)
Diana Eck and Charlene Spretnak: Approaches to Inter-Spiritual Awareness

Diana Eck

A Christian theologian who has written on inter-spiritual dialogue in a compelling manner is Diana Eck. In her book: “Encountering God: A spiritual Journey From Bozeman to Banaras” (Eck, 1993), she addresses the issue of inter-spiritual dialogue with the same spirit that I have found in the vision of Shambhala training I outlined in the last chapter. I would now like to take the time to examine some of her points in depth as they address two issues that are important for this thesis. As I agree with Eck’s suggestions, one of these issues is the clarification of my approach to inter-spiritual dialogue, which in turn I would propose provides some points that a non-Buddhist reader may wish to contemplate while reading this thesis. The second is to answer the question of “why bother” writing such a thesis in the first place.

The question of “why bother” was brought home to me some years ago by a member of my sangha in Toronto who had for many years been engaged in inter-religious dialogue, meeting regularly with members of other faiths for discussions. He told me that in the end he had stopped going to the meetings as he found that they had become for him, an experience of “exchanging their trips”. What I understood him to mean was that the meetings had for him become simply a forum where a group of people got together and discussed their beliefs, presenting the structures of their faiths. For him there was nothing in the meetings that provoked or assisted in the spiritual development of the participants. They might be interesting simply as opportunities to hear about other traditions - which could be a valid reason for attending the meetings - but
he didn’t find them to be helpful in his spiritual journey, which in the broadest understanding of the spiritual, means they were not helpful in his life.

There is another related point I would like to make here. That is that the description of religions given by Houston Smith as being “storehouses of techniques developed by people on spiritual journeys” can make the processes and traditions sound somewhat like spiritual gymnasiums where one can go and put together a routine of exercises that work best for you, borrowing from whichever tradition you choose, however you choose. I would suggest that it is a little more complex than that and Eck’s work will help to clarify my position while answering the two questions. At the heart of her book is the presentation of three approaches to inter-spiritual relations: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.

First there is the exclusivist response: our own community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God, is the one and only truth, excluding all others. Second there is the inclusivist response: There are indeed many communities, traditions and truths, but our own way of seeing things is the culmination of the others, superior to the others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms. A third response is that of the pluralist: Truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one tradition or community. Therefore the diversity of communities, traditions, understandings of the truth, and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement and dialogue with one another. It does not mean giving up our commitments; rather, it means opening up those commitments to the give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed transformation. (Eck, 1993, p. 168)
Eck is not apologetic about her use of God in her description of the responses. She is a practicing Christian and as such her writing is deeply connected to her faith and her work in inter-spiritual dialogue. She balances her commitment to her Christianity and her use of ‘God’ language with an openness to other traditions. She later states that her “aim is not to include Buddhists on my terms, but to understand the Buddhist in his or her own terms, to test and broaden my own self-understanding in light of that encounter.” (Eck, 1993, p.187) As a Buddhist who does not consider the question of whether God exists or not to be a necessary issue in my spiritual practice, I would say that I can take up what I consider to be the core of her position and apply them from a Buddhist perspective without worrying about the existence of a God, yet while still appreciating and searching for the meanings and experience of people who use the word God.

I would add that in my experience, most people who are open to working in this way tend to move between the inclusivist and pluralist responses. I know that in both academic studies as well as in dialogue with members of other traditions, I tend to use Buddhist epistemological and ontological descriptions of the nature of mind and existence, as they are the perspectives that make sense to me and resonate with my experience both during my formal meditation practice and in the rest of my life. I wouldn’t be involved in the tradition if this were not the case. However, at the same time I try to keep an open mind so that I know when I am getting entangled in the words rather than the meaning or spirit of the words when I am relating to others. Furthermore, I do not pretend to have everything fixed or completely understood. Accepting this in regard to my practice and study of Buddhism allows me to enter dialogue, or simply be in relationship with others, with the aspiration of learning something that will be a real lesson.
Such lessons can transcend the boundaries of vocabulary and provide me not only with examples of the application and living example of values and ways of relating to others that I hope to embody, but also help me through question and answer to be more aware of where my understanding of Buddhist teaching is fuzzy or illogical. Eck supports this view in her statement that “the aim is not only for mutual understanding, but mutual self-understanding and mutual transformation.” (Eck, 1993, p.189) This emphasis on one’s spiritual journey in the context of the larger transformation of society echoes the Shambhalian goal of creating enlightened society, just as her commitment to her own faith, while also affirming the integrity of others, echoes the Shambhalian acceptance of the inclusion of other traditions in its vision of an enlightened world. She further emphasizes her point at the end of the chapter on the three responses by quoting Cantwell Smith: “Our vision and our loyalties, as well as our aircraft, must circle the globe.” (Smith cited in Eck, 1993, p. 199) In her own words, she makes a similar point: “Mutual understanding and mutual transformation are important, but in the world in which we live, the cooperative transformation of our global and local cultures is essential.” (Eck, 1993, p. 199)

There are a few final points that Eck makes that are worth bearing in mind. Firstly, pluralism is not simply relativism. In other words, the openness is married to a commitment to whatever path one is on, or whatever secular principles one espouses. There is no need to try to jury-rig a world view that accepts everything others propound, but rather, there is a need to respect differences. Pluralism is thus neither relativism, nor syncretism, but an approach to dialogue that is based on a deep commitment to one’s path. This commitment takes the form of a probing, committed exploration of that path aided by a willingness to meet others on their terms while also sharing our own.
In the context of this thesis, the implications are twofold. Firstly, for the reader I would hope that whatever tradition or secular position you live and practice, you exercise an openness to the experiences which the participants were willing to share. Secondly, it is my hope that this text will serve to provoke and inspire a deeper reading and experience of your own tradition and practice, whatever that may be. In the larger context of my career, if I continue in academic research, I hope to engage with teachers and researchers from outside my tradition producing work that is committed to a pluralistic presentation of whatever traditions I am privileged to encounter.

**Charlene Spretnak**

Another influence on my approach to inter-spiritual awareness and dialogue is Charlene Spretnak. A brief discussion of her work will build on the points that Eck made about inter-spiritual dialogue, and from my perspective, provide the reader with a sufficient understanding of my approach, thereby setting the stage for the discussion of Buddhist and non-Buddhist influences on my spirituality and my practice of teaching. This discussion also serves to underline the reasons this thesis is not proselytizing in intention. In the core chapters of her book: “States of Grace” (Spretnak, 1991), she examines four of what she calls “the great wisdom traditions.” The four that she discusses are: Roman Catholicism, Theravadin Buddhism, and Goddess and Native American spirituality. The book as a whole is an impressive and compelling exploration some of the strengths of each tradition as she endeavours to present the particular genius of each tradition: community, mind, the body and nature, respectively. While I do not agree with all of her analysis as I find many of the strengths can be found in the other traditions as well, and particularly in other
forms of the traditions, for example the emphasis on community in Mahayana forms of Buddhism (for an explanation of Mahayana Buddhism see chapter four on Buddhism), I find her appreciation of each tradition to be very much in the spirit of Eck’s pluralism.

There is one element that Spretnak adds that is particularly relevant. She is very clear on the nature of her connection with each tradition. She was brought up a Roman Catholic, has practiced the Vipassana tradition of Buddhism for decades, and been involved in Goddess spirituality for almost as long. She has also studied Native American spirituality and been involved in some ceremonies where in her words she "benefited greatly from the generous attitude of several Indian friends and colleagues." (Spretnak, 1991, p. 7) This could be seen as simply laying out her credentials, but I think it serves a more important role than that. There is a tendency these days that Spretnak also identifies wherein people who are searching for some form of meaning and spiritual awakening take up bits and pieces of traditions that have ancient roots and extensive teachings about how to carry out the practices taught in their lineage. In some cases, it can be dangerous to carry out practices without the guidance of masters and elders to help one avoid pitfalls, and to clarify and stabilize insights.

In the case of Native American spirituality it is even more significant in that there have been so many abuses in the past 500 years that appropriation and misapplication is seen as cultural theft and worse. So while I agree with the importance of inter-spiritual awareness and dialogue, I appreciate Spretnak’s emphasis on making clear the nature of her connection with the lineage of each tradition she discusses. In my spiritual path of Tibetan Buddhism, it is considered a central part of the teaching and practice of the disciplines to recognize the lineage of teachers going back unbroken to the Buddha, and in fact it is said that without this connection and the blessings of the lineage - in other words, without
receiving the transmission of a master of the tradition who has been given permission by her guru to give the practices to students - there will be no realization from practicing the particular meditation or sadhana.

In the case of this thesis, I have tried to make clear my connection to Buddhism as well as my early connection to Christianity and Roman Catholicism. As Spretnak also said of her experience of Roman Catholicism, I feel an ongoing sense of a live connection to the church, through both its formative impact on my early years, through the way that my western education and training has made me conversant with the teachings of the church, as well as through a sense of an on-going and live connection through my parents and friends who are strongly committed to Roman Catholicism. While I still recognize that at this point I speak as a Buddhist, I respect and appreciate the beneficial influence and feel that through the power of my heritage as well as through the principles of pluralism Eck described, to speak clearly from my position. It is of course the responsibility and right of the reader to take up what I write in light of your position.
Theism, Non-Theism and Simply Observing

Bearing in mind the above discussion of pluralism and lineage, in this section I will present what I consider to be the major common ground or starting point among the spiritual traditions of the world. This is the final step I feel is necessary in presenting my approach to spirituality in general. I wish to remind the reader that I am not saying that this is the only important aspect of spirituality, or that it is necessarily superior to other approaches to religious experience. Rather, this is my understanding at this point in my spiritual journey, and the basis for my present work.

To begin with, perhaps the major difference is between theistic (for example the Judeo-Christian) and non-theistic (for example the Buddhist) traditions. Trungpa Rinpoche described the difference in the following way: “Although the Buddhist way is non-theistic, it does not contradict the theistic disciplines. Rather the differences are a matter of emphasis and method .... The Buddhist approach begins with our confusion and suffering and works toward the unraveling of their origin. The theistic approach begins with the richness of God and works toward raising consciousness so as to experience God’s presence. But since the obstacles to relating with God are our confusion and negativities, the theistic approach must also deal with them.” (Trungpa, 1973, p. 4)

“Confusion and negativities” are another way of describing the autism that O’Sullivan mention. It is not that the problems are so overwhelming that we cannot work with them. A clearer understanding would recognize that everyday we are influencing the world and that there are many ways to work toward a better future. This is especially so in the case of teachers, who in the span of their careers can effect the lives of hundreds of children.
If we look at the specific practices, the similarities relate directly to developing the ability to recognize and address the issues. One of the most important starting points for any spiritual tradition is developing mindfulness and awareness, terms commonly used to describe meditation practice. Laurence Freeman, the spiritual director of the World Community for Christian Meditation states that “What all religions share is a deep tradition of meditation that stems from the original teachings of their founders ... Father George Timko, a Greek Orthodox priest, says: “Christianity became trapped at some point by thinking that prayer is verbalization and asking. That’s a wrong understanding of prayer. The Greek word prouveukomai (translated as ‘prayer’) simply means to be in a state of mindful awareness. Theoria (usually translated as ‘contemplation’) is watching, observing, simply looking.” (Hayward, 1995, p. 67)

From Tibetan Buddhism to Orthodox Christianity and on to Roman Catholicism, spiritual practices contain an element of meditation, of relaxing the mind and simply observing what occurs. This does not simply mean looking inward or looking outward. There is a recognition of the fundamental interconnectedness of existence from which the boundary between self and other, or inner and outer, breaks down. The connections between responses such as despair and callousness, anger and aggression and the further negativity they give rise to, as well as the effects of the positive characteristics mentioned in the last two chapters, can be examined. States of mind which promote sane, joyful lives can be nurtured, while negative mind states which promote confusion and the autism mentioned above can be recognized, their causes and conditions contemplated, and then practices carried out to learn how to work with the entire range of the arising, dwelling and then the letting go of such negativity. In short, in an educational environment, the entire experience of the
learning situation becomes clearer and more joyful as mindfulness and awareness develops.

There is one essential point that I wish to make at this juncture. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, my appreciation for other spiritual traditions, as well as any insight I have into them is largely based on my practice and study of Buddhism. Therefore I do not believe that what I have argued above as the most significant commonplace of spirituality will necessarily be agreed with by practitioners of other traditions. Furthermore, although the language I use and the manner of presenting it may sometimes have an air of certainty to it, I would rather the reader see my position as the first step in a discussion. This discussion will not be completed in this thesis; rather, my hope is that the discussion continues after the thesis has been read, provoking thought and contemplation and informing further discussions in real time. This aspiration I have tried to emphasize by writing in the first person - I do not hold to anything here as a truth, but rather as what I am able to express at this point along my journey as a teacher and as a spiritual practitioner. To put this as clearly as possible, I invite the reader to use all of the first person accounts found in this thesis, as well as their insights into the issues presented here, to put together a sense of who I am and how that influences the points I make. This will be particularly true when we come to the narrative and analysis chapters, and the presentations of the lives of the participants. You the reader may come up with insights that I have overlooked, or with your own interpretations. As I said, I invite those and in fact hope to foster them through helping you to understand me.
Practitioners and Writers: Examples and Influences

In this section I will present some influences from spiritual traditions outside my immediate lineage of Tibetan Buddhism to demonstrate how individuals who have immersed themselves in different traditions have provided me with rich material to contemplate. I have been challenged and inspired by these people in the same way that Spretnak and Eck inspired me. They have informed how I approach my practice of teaching as well as the practice of my own spiritual tradition and my connections with other traditions.

The first is Jack Miller who has been my teacher and advisor at OISE. His seminal work in holistic education provided me with an overall structural framework in which to place my work as an educator and as an academic. Miller is a practitioner of Theravadin Buddhism, as well as a Christian, and as such a living demonstration of the possibility for inter-religious and inter-spiritual dialogue and practice. In two courses I took with him at OISE, the students were obliged to carry out some form of spiritual discipline and maintain a log of their experience. His books such as “The Contemplative Practitioner” (Miller, 1994), are full of anecdotes and examples of the influences of the various practices that his students carried out over the many years he has taught the courses. This book is the closest reference I have found to the work I have done for this thesis. The difference is that in “The Contemplative Practitioner”, Miller’s examples tend to be of individuals who were new to meditation. Furthermore, the extracts in the chapter on the effects of contemplative practices are from the journals that he has the students keep, while in this thesis, I had the luxury of holding from two to four lengthy interviews with each teacher. In many ways, I see my work as an addition to “The Contemplative Practitioner”, focusing on a particular tradition
as opposed to the wide range of practices that Miller's students were free to choose from.

The framework I mentioned above is his three positions of curriculum: transmission, transaction and transformation. (Miller, 1988, pp. 4-7) These three positions are not a definition of curriculum, but rather descriptions of three general modes of engaging in the curriculum. Transmission is a teaching style that tends to be teacher centered, with the teacher lecturing and directing classroom activities while the students receive the knowledge. Transaction is more interactive, with the teacher and the student engaging in processes in which there is give and take; the material covered and the manner in which it is covered is more negotiated. There is less of a feeling of pouring knowledge into the students who sit and take it in, and more of a sense that the students engage with the knowledge and make it their own in their own ways.

Transformation is a way of being in curriculum in which the categories of teacher, student, milieu and subject matter begin to blur. A teacher may be the one who gets paid to be there, but she is still engaged in a process of learning, in the classroom just as in all of her life. In the same manner, students may be the ones who don't get paid, but they too are teaching. Not only do they teach themselves and each other, they also participate in the learning that the teacher engages in. The categories of teacher and student dissolve as the boundary between the students and the teachers dissolve. What is seen as subject matter becomes as much the mindscape of the individuals as it is the environment and the ministry directed learning objectives. The teaching milieu expands as the participants stop seeing the walls of the classroom as defining wherein certain topics are considered. Curriculum extends back into histories which are brought into the moment, as is the future wherein participants will continue to live and contemplate the experiences that occurred in the classroom. Perhaps most
importantly, every aspect of the daily interactions is integrated into the curriculum or learning situation, and as such the curriculum becomes a spiritual journey that continues every moment of every day. This understanding of the spiritual as being an integrative force will be further developed later in the thesis, for now let it suffice to flag it as an important attribute of spiritual practice.

It is important to remember that Miller’s modes are not to be seen as replacing the mode before it. In other words, engaging in curriculum in the transformation mode does not mean that transmission or transaction is done away with. They are nested in each other. This means that there can still be a place for didactic instruction where the students may be sitting and taking notes while the teacher is standing at the blackboard giving instruction. However, this activity would be one phase of a curriculum process that would include other kinds of activities, and in which the teacher would still be learning, just as the students would be teaching. Furthermore, there is still a recognition of the centrality of professional competence and area expertise for teaching in all three modes.

Communication is always going on between the various elements described above as being present in the curriculum setting. Individuals may not be able to appreciate or perceive all of the communication, but it is still going on. It comes back to a question of the levels of autism as mentioned by O’Sullivan, and the levels of mindfulness and awareness. The degree to which a given student or teacher may consciously or unconsciously ignore the messages is reflected in problems such as discipline that is coercive and destructive rather than a process through which participants develop their own sense of discipline. This perspective on awareness and communication underlines another important point in my understanding of spirituality. That is, that there must be something in the tradition that opens the practitioner to what is happening around them. In
other words, the practices should have some quality of promoting the ability to see through habitual conceptualizations about the nature of reality, and developing a way of relating to experience that promotes curiosity and clarity. This approach helps both the student and the teacher develop a willingness to take chances in many ways, knowing that the environment is safe and nurturing of the courage necessary for such risks.

As I stated in the introduction, there is not an extensive literature on the relationship between in-service teachers’ classroom experience and their spiritual lives. At OISE, there has been narrative inquiry into meditation and teaching written by Anne Mulvaney at OISE (Mulvaney, 1994), but even in her literature review there is nothing specifically on the topic. However, there is along with Miller’s work (Miller, 1988, 1994; Miller, Cassie and Drake, 1990), a growing body of literature on teacher education and spirituality.

Related areas abound such as the work of Steiner who laid out spiritual exercises and a realm of celestial beings, and has a full sense of the spiritual aspect of education through what he called Anthroposophy (Steiner, 1894, 1976). The Waldorf method is very close to the education systems that have been established by my sangha in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Boulder, Colorado. However, there is still a significant difference between the perspective of Anthroposophy and Buddhism.

bell hooks has written from the perspective of a black feminist Buddhist who is also a teacher and scholar (hooks, 1995), however her work does not address the relationship between Buddhist practice and teaching. Educators and activists such as Thomas Berry (Berry, 1991), Joanna Macy (Macy, 1990) and Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) have all called for a re-awakening of spirituality in education, but none have researched the actual relationship of Buddhist practice and teaching. Another significant possible connection from psychology is the
work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on flow and the difference between happiness and pleasure that will be a theme in the narratives. Csikszentmihalyi sees happiness as being a deeper state of joy than simple pleasure, and one that involves attributes such as connectedness, the loss of ego awareness, and the replacement of goal oriented activity by taking pleasure in the act itself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993).

There have been some articles which are closer to the thesis question. Robert Tremmel's article: “Zen and the art of Practice and Teacher Education” (Tremmel, 1990), in which he draws interesting parallels between reflective practice and a Buddhist, specifically Zen meditation. Clifford Mayes' article: “The Use of Contemplative Practices in Teacher Education” (Mayes, 1998) is a broad ranging discussion of the spiritual and ethical genesis of teachers' initial interest in education as a career, the significance and potential of meditative practices in education and teacher training, as well as spirituality and political awareness, various psychological approaches such as transpersonal or psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1971, 1977), fourth force (Maslow, 1968, 1970), gestalt (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951) and a interesting overview of spirituality and education. Mayes' article, was published in the journal: “Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice”, formerly the “Holistic Education Review”. A number of the articles referenced in this thesis were taken from one of the two incarnations of this journal, and it is the best source of material I have found in the area of spirituality and education. There was an issue based on presentations given at a conference on spirituality and education held at the Naropa Institute, which is mentioned in appendix I.

One Christian author of note is Parker Palmer, whose “To Know as we are Known” (Palmer, 1993) presents a vision of prayer as loving relatedness. He calls for this mode of prayerful relationship to be present in classrooms, while at
the same time opposing the Christian right call for overt prayer in the classroom, and movingly explores the need for a recognition of the sacred in teaching and learning. Another Christian educator/writer is John Gatto whose article “Education and the Western Spiritual Tradition” (Gatto, 1997) explores the power of American Puritanism’s congregational tradition as an example of the spiritual power of the tradition of individual rights and liberties. Gatto’s work as an award winning educator in inner-city schools makes his writing, as Ron Miller put it, “...powerful and so necessary because he sees so clearly the terrible damage that modernist education has inflicted on the human spirit.” (Miller, 1997).

It is important to also recognize that there are educator/writers who are not affiliated with a spiritual tradition, or at least do not speak overtly about their spirituality in connection with an established church or community, and yet present many of the same kinds of messages and insights from their experience as teachers. William Ayers is a prime example of this kind of writer, as exemplified in his book: “To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher”. Based on his decades as a classroom teachers and teacher-educator, Ayers echoes Jack Miller’s transformative mode of curriculum, saying: “There are still worlds to change - including specific, individual worlds, one by one - and classrooms can be places of possibility and transformation for youngsters, certainly, but also for teachers. Teaching can still be world-changing work. And this I believe is finally the reason to teach.” (Ayers, 1993, p. 8).

In his book, Ayers made many of the same points that the teacher/practitioners made in the interviews, and which some of the writers made in this chapter. Ayers states that “Teaching is primarily a matter of love.” (Ayers, 1993, p. 18), an approach to teaching that is called for by both Palmer (Palmer, 1993) and Jack Miller (Miller, 1988, 1994), and which was mentioned
explicitly by three of the teacher/practitioners. Another point that Ayers makes is that one of the key questions an educator should ask herself when contemplating their teaching practice and their students is: "Who is this person before me?" (Ayers, 1993, p. 29). For all of the teacher/practitioners, this search for ways to understand and work with their students was greatly assisted by their practice.

One of the wonderful things about the book is the wealth of very specific insights that he shares. He spoke of the reward of teaching as "Knowing that your life makes a difference." (Ayers, 1993, p. 24). This point was made explicitly by one of the participants and at least alluded to by the others. The same teacher was a special education teacher at the time, and described how his approach to teaching involved working with his students' strengths or as he put it their "basic goodness", rather than labeling them and focusing on their weaknesses. This is a point that Ayers spends a lot of time discussing. He also spoke of the need for balanced self-criticism in order to promote "renewal and growth" (Ayers, 1993, p. 130), a topic that one of the teacher/participants discussed at length, saying that their practice helped them to be more overtly conscious of the process of self-criticism, while also balancing it with gentleness.
Summary

This chapter has had a number of steps that I felt were necessary to explain my approach to, and understanding of, spirituality. Based on my own experiences of spiritual practice, I have come to appreciate spiritual practice in general, and have tried to move from the exclusivist response to other spiritual traditions, to a more pluralistic one. In so doing, I have come to appreciate not only the similarities that I see in practitioners of other traditions, such as the appreciation for silence and space, and the integrative power of spiritual community as was seen in the work of John Gatto and will be discussed in the chapter on Buddhism, but also the differences such as the variety of practices carried out. Although there is not a great deal of literature in the field, as I discussed, there are ground breaking writers and teachers such as Miller, Palmer, Gatto and others who are providing examples and pointing out possibilities in answer to the rising interest in spirituality. This interest is sadly the product of the growth of problems that beset us these days, and the despair and autism that O'Sullivan spoke of. However, it is my hope that work such as that done by the people mentioned above, and perhaps even this thesis, may provide an uplifting alternative and a way to work with the difficulties.
Introduction: Buddhism 101

At this point an explanation of some of the fundamentals of Buddhism will set the stage for the methodology section where I will discuss narrative as a methodology particularly appropriate for this kind of research. Beyond methodological issues, the actual core of this thesis - the teacher narratives and subsequent discussion and analysis - demand an understanding of some of the core teachings of Buddhism. This is a somewhat daunting task, as there are a vast array of teachings and practices that could barely be encompassed in any one library, let alone one paper. It is also important to state that there is not one form of Buddhism. The differences can be quite substantial, even when dealing with central tenets of Buddha Dharma (Buddhist teachings) such as the abidharma teachings on the nature of mind. I will not attempt a scholarly presentation of, for example, the differences between a Theravadin, a Zen and a Vajrayana interpretation of these teachings.

What I will attempt is to express my understanding of the teachings as a vajrayana practitioner on the same path and in the same community as the teacher/participants. In this way, the explanations can be seen as reference points and to some extent as the development of a lexicon for the thesis. There is also a glossary of terms included in the appendix. I would like to make clear that this is not a statement on the authenticity or validity of the various paths, or of their transformative power as spiritual processes. Having met teachers from various traditions, it is my experience that wisdom is not so much dependent on
the path as it is on the commitment of the practitioner to practicing and applying the teachings to their moment-by-moment experience.

Finally, I will not argue the validity of each point by presenting counter arguments and classical disputes on interpretations, but rather try to give the reader a sense of how the participants experience and use Buddhist teachings and practice in their daily lives, with the understanding that for each participant, as for myself, our understandings of the teachings reflected in our usage and understanding of the terminology is an on-going exploration that deepens as our journey progresses. There are many good books available where each point is discussed at length if the reader is interested.

One last point to be made is that I have purposefully avoided an overly scholastic presentation of the dharma. I wanted to capture the feeling of a conversation, as that is how many people experience the application of the teachings in their lives. It is also the style I have used when giving talks on Buddha Dharma at the Shambhala Center in Toronto. The actual content is the result of my 15 years of study and practice of Buddhism with sources ranging from scholarly articles to published books and limited circulation transcripts of talks given by various teachers. However, in striving for a natural communicative feeling that reflects my working understanding and application of Buddhism, in this chapter I wrote from my memory and with only occasional reference to texts which are cited where applicable. And now, it is with some trepidation that I will select what I consider to be five key elements that will suffice for the purposes of this thesis.

Study, Contemplation and Meditation
The first point is that Buddhism, according to Buddhist teachers, is not simply a system of thought. It is not a theoretical structure that can be mastered through study. Buddhism is a spiritual path that one engages through the interpenetrating activities of contemplation, study and meditation practices (Gyamtso, 1988). None of these are ends in themselves, as the distinctions between practice, study, contemplation and any other moment of experience gradually dissolves as each activity informs the other. Furthermore, the reason for engaging in each activity is not to amass a volume of information, or to simply attain a state of tranquillity or bliss. There are stages along the path which will be discussed below, where the practitioner's motivations and aspirations shift as insight into the nature of mind and of relationship, developed through all three processes, prepare one for further practices. The practitioner experiences a broader sense of such things as who one is practicing for and how one uncovers and works with ever more subtle aspects of ego.

Contemplation is the act of reflecting on one's life in the context of one's study of Buddhist teachings and the experience of practice. The practices are specific meditative techniques and in my sangha, the first that people are introduced to is shamatha-vipashyana, a kind of breath meditation that is common to many forms of Buddhism as well as to other spiritual traditions. Shamatha is a more focused meditation, with attention being placed upon the breath, the environment and the mind, while vipashyana is more environmental and relaxed. Shamatha-vipashyana is encountered at many stages in the path and is often integrated with other practices. Later, in the Mahayana, a practitioner is introduced to practices such as tonglen after which there are the many sadhana practices of the Vajrayana or Tantric tradition. I will say more about these later in the context of the stages of the path. The practices are carried
out not as ritualistic activities, although they may include ritualistic elements and liturgies. They are designed to provide the practitioner with opportunities for experiences through which to explore the mind and the teachings directly, and to develop the way of being that is described in the teachings.

Another important aspect of the integration of study, contemplation and meditation is the integrative effect of engaging in all three activities. Study and contemplation provide an important link between the meditative experiences and the post-meditation experiences. Post-meditation is essentially any experiences in life that occur outside of the formal meditation practice, or as is sometimes said, 'off the cushion'. Through slowing down the normally speedy flow of discursive thinking with all its layers of conceptualizations, emotions and other more subtle flickers of mental activity, meditation provides a glimpse of an alternative to the conventional relationship we have with our mental processes. This spaciousness begins to colour the experiences of study and contemplation, allowing aspects such as the mixed motivations that are present during those activities to arise. In my own experience, I find that when I study there can sometimes be a quality of wanting to have an arsenal of knowledge to use in order to defeat others, impress them and entertain them. In effect there can be many different motivations including that of simply wanting to develop the ability to work with my situation and benefit others, and the overall process helps me to strengthen the helpful motivations while dissolving the unhelpful ones.

This process is further developed through contemplation of the insights and experiences, and the application of these in post-meditation experience. The goal is to dissolve the boundaries of the distinctions between the various aspects, so that one's existence as a whole becomes infused with an attitude of compassion, of patience and of the other attributes fostered in Buddhism.
Furthermore, there are many post-meditation practices such as tea ceremony, flower arranging, Kyudo or Japanese archery, martial arts, calligraphy and many others, which also promote the integration of all of one’s life experience. A traditional metaphor for this is that the dharma should seep into one’s life thoroughly, just as ink sinks into and completely colours a piece of paper. This issue of integration will come up again later, both in the methodology section, as well as in the narratives and the analysis, as it was a significant aspect of the teacher/practitioners’ experiences.

The Three Jewels

When one formally becomes a Buddhist, there is a ceremony called ‘taking refuge’. This ceremony is essentially a public and personal declaration that one has decided to engage in the Buddhist path and stop searching for a spiritual tradition. This doesn’t mean that one is declaring that other traditions are necessarily flawed or incorrect, but rather that from that point on, the individual intends to put their energy into practicing that path deeply. The ‘three jewels’ in the name of the ceremony are the Buddha as an example of a human who achieved enlightenment by clearing away all confusion and seeing directly into the nature of mind, the sangha or the community of practitioners, and the dharma or the teachings and practices of Buddhism as the path that one is committed to following.

One interesting point that provides much of the path quality is the nature of the commitment to the sangha. There are different degrees of commitment depending on the stage of the path one is on, but one essential feature is to provide an opportunity for each member of the sangha to have a group of people with whom one can be both genuine and open. In this case, genuine
means that one isn’t always editing oneself and trying to be good in a self-conscious, ‘follow the rules’ manner, but rather trying to be as honest as possible while also striving to remain open to the feedback from one’s peers, and for that matter from all of one’s experience.

This cycle of genuineness and openness provides a process which, while sometimes painful when our confusion is mirrored back, pointing out flaws and the ways in which we manifest and create confusion, is a very powerful means for developing a clear understanding of one’s habitual patterns as well as for the development of wisdom, compassion and skillfulness, three attributes that will be discussed below. The entire process is carried out in the context of a compassionate attitude toward all sentient beings, an essential motivation to keep the feedback in the realm of the helpful rather than the solely hurtful. The sense of commitment to one’s sangha is not exclusivist in the sense that with others there is less of a need for compassion or empathy, or that one should attempt to act in ways that would benefit sangha members more than other sentient beings. To the contrary, the sangha provides opportunities to develop one’s compassion so that every aspect of one’s life becomes opportunities to benefit all sentient beings.

The Four Noble Truths

So what are these teachings mentioned so far? A good starting point is the four noble truths that are among the first words that the Buddha spoke after his enlightenment. They are: the truth of suffering - that life is characterized by dukha (Often translated as suffering, but perhaps more accurately as a quality of unsatisfactoriness or incompleteness. The condition has also been described as a state of various degrees and varieties of anxiety); the truth of the cause of
suffering - that this suffering is the result of attachment, in particular attachment to a belief in the existence of an essential self; the truth of cessation of suffering - that this situation can be remedied; and the truth of the path of cessation - that a way to remedy the situation is through the path of Buddhism.

In these four truths one finds the core explanation of what Buddhism is. There is a diagnosis of the condition of sentient beings - that is that there exits a pervasive experience of suffering that all beings are caught up in. This condition is considered to be a manifestation of the confused belief in an enduring self or ego which does not actually exist in the way that our actions would suggest it exists. This confusion and the resulting suffering can be overcome, and at least one way to do this is to follow the example of the historical Buddha, a who actually managed to see through the confusion. Buddhism can thus be seen to be a process or path, the aim of which is to help beings to overcome confusion and suffering. Any teachings or practices found in Buddhism, have this as their ultimate aim.

From and Formlessness or Relative and Ultimate Truth, and the Three Kleshas

The third element is found in a sutra called the Prajna Paramita Sutra. A sutra is a record of the words of the historical Buddha. This particular sutra addresses an issue at the heart of the Buddhist teachings. It is the core epistemological and ontological statement upon which literally thousands of texts and practices are based. The sutra presents a number of teachings, but the one that is most relevant to this is that on form and emptiness. "Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness." (translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee from Tibetan, unpublished)
While a full explanation of this quotation would be quite lengthy, the main point is that all phenomena are empty of a "lasting, single and independent" identity (Gyamtso, 1988, p. 21). An example of this that directly relates to the four truths is that of the nature of our belief in our own existence, sometimes also phrased as a belief in the existence of our ego as a lasting, single and independent entity. It would be ridiculous to suggest that there is nothing to our common-sense experience that as humans we experience life and have some kind of identity. However, this identity could be considered to be a form. If we examine the elements that make up that form, it is impossible to identify any lasting, single and independent element that could be considered to be the essence of that form.

What we might find is that there are many composite processes that make up the form, but that these processes are in a constant state of change, and that they also intersect with other forms. Any boundary or boundared entity that we posit, such as the skin or our personality, is porous - there are no absolute boundaries, either emotionally or physically. Physically we are taking in food and expelling wastes, emotionally our identity can be closely dependent on our involvement in larger social bodies such as clan, family and profession, as well as effected by events such as the weather and a beautiful night sky. Therefore, we can say that the forms such as those mentioned above are empty of fixed nature, yet existence is not without form. It is not that there is no activity, but that the activity always contains and is contained within the activity of other forms, all of which are implicated in each other.

From this ontological perspective arises the epistemological understanding called the two truths: relative truth which relates to form, and absolute truth (also sometimes called universal or ultimate truth) which relates to emptiness (Gyamtso, 1988, Tai Situpa, 1992). Statements about the processes
involved in the experiential reality of the construction and maintenance of ego, and about the operation of the various drives that solidify our experience of ego, are of the relative level of truth in that they are talking about form. Another way of describing these processes is that they are the dynamics of how emotions are experienced, and how on a daily basis we work with the projected reification of mental phenomena such as the existence in our minds of the perceived solidity of objects and sentient beings in our environments. They are relative in that their reality or accuracy is relational in that they are the products of causal relationships in time and space, where we project onto our perceptions the illusion of permanency and solidity and act in a manner that further enforces that perception. Ultimate truth relates to the reality of the lack of a single, lasting and independent essence of any named objects such as the ego, other beings or non-sentient aspects of our world. This is sometimes talked about as emptiness, but this emptiness is not a nihilistic void, but rather a field of occurrences, all linked to each other and depending on one's confused beliefs and habitual mental patterns for their sense of solidity.

It is important to recognize that relative and absolute truth are not conflicting realities. In the statement that "Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness," there is also the implication that absolute and relative truth are in a sense the same thing. However, the experience of the non-duality of the relative and the absolute, or of form and formlessness, is attained only through practice. It is also talked about as luminosity. In the Vajrayana Buddhist teachings there is a description of the stages of experience. First one has an experience of form. This is - or can be - followed by a glimpse of emptiness of the solidity of phenomena, which can be followed by an experience of luminosity (Trungpa, Orderly Chaos, 1991, p. 132). The concept of luminosity is a way to avoid the danger of dualism.
Luminosity helps us to understand the merging of the concepts and experiences of form and emptiness because it speaks of a universe experienced as a field of energy representing the brilliant, alive quality of a universe which is vibrant with energy. In this universe, the forms that we perceive are devoid of their confused solidity, yet they have a form of interpenetrating existence, and manifest qualities that are constantly shifting and changing. This co-existence of form and constant change is the luminous quality.

Another way of describing some of the same insights into the nature of existence described in relative truth, absolute truth and luminosity is found in the work of Thomas Berry, the Catholic priest and ecologist. Berry describes the universe as having the qualities of "subjectivity, communion and differentiation", or as being a "single, multi-form, energy event" (Berry, 1988). As I understand Berry, 'subjectivity' and 'multi-form' represent the relative level of conventional experience wherein there is an experience of individual identity and agency, while differentiation acknowledges the qualitative differences that forms manifest. 'Communion' and 'single' represent the interconnection of phenomena and lack of permanent, independent boundaried forms that absolute truth represents, and 'energy events' appears to be resonant with the Buddhist understanding of luminousity. Berry's description may make it easier to grasp how the descriptions of experience and existence need not be seen as contradictory, but rather describe various aspects of the manifestation of phenomena.

The description of relative and absolute truth, and of luminousity, serve as a reference point during meditation for how to view certain experiences of non-conceptual, unmediated experience that may be glimpsed during practice. These glimpses may in turn become more consistent and stabilized after many years of practice. At the same time, it is taught that in post-meditation - in other words
between formal meditation sessions - one has to relate to phenomena and work with forms as we experience them. The Buddhist teaching of relative and absolute truth is helpful in providing a way to work with the gap between one’s daily, conventional experience, and whatever insight one has of emptiness and luminousity. The idea is not to forget that there is the quality of emptiness, but rather to relate directly with one’s experience of the world, seeing in the forms the fluid energy that is constantly shifting while still drinking tea, talking with friends or doing one’s work. This also helps avoid the potential tendency to avoid engaging with the world. The practice of Buddhism is not designed to provide an escape from the world, but to assist in engaging with it as fully as possible. As I pointed out in the preceding chapters, in Buddhism as in spirituality in general, calling the spiritual disciplines ‘practice’ points to the attitude that they are practice for post-meditation experience. As such, they provide a reference point for how to work with one’s mind and experience, as well as training for countering the habitual patterns of experiencing the world and one’s ego as solid.

The above is a sketch which may provide more questions than answers. The main point that our identities - both physical and emotional - are not lasting, eternal or single, but contain and are contained within other levels of identity, and that they are mutually dependent, is fairly straightforward. One might consider this to be almost common sense. The question that Buddhism raises is: if that is the nature of existence, why then do we relate to ourselves as if our identities are single, lasting and independent? Specifically, it makes the claim that the cause of our suffering is that we relate to ourselves and other phenomena as if it did have some lasting, single and independent essence. An example of this is the way in which we tend to relate to threats to our constructed identities with some form of aggressive defence. Most people have had the experience of
feeling defensive when challenged, and Buddhism looks at the root causes for this defensiveness.

Through the practice of shamatha/vipashyana, one follows the technique to calm the mind, and in so doing is better able to observe the mind’s activity. The initial calming of the mind and the spaciousness that is experienced is not a simple process of ‘meditate and you’ll become calm and equanimous’. Often the experience on the cushion - even for experienced practitioners - can be extremely turbulent, with emotions and thoughts feeling as if they had never been so strong or so vivid. This experience is the natural product of actually paying attention to the activity of the mind without having any other activity to distract one from simply observing. In normal, daily experience, there is always some distraction, even if that distraction is savouring the peace and tranquillity of a sunset, or a moment’s calm over a cup of coffee on a busy day. Even in these cases there is the entertaining distraction of being aware of the contrast and the pleasure of the moment. In shamatha the goal is not to avoid pain or seek pleasure, but to observe without commentary the minutiae of mental phenomena. In this way, any thought - kind, cruel, creative, sexual, generous, noble or otherwise - are all seen as just thoughts which can be allowed to arise and then dissolve without needing to comment on their goodness, badness, brilliance, or the degree to which they create pain or pleasure.

The point of this description is firstly that in the greater arc of a practitioner’s meditative experience, just as in their post-meditation experience, there is a cumulative effect of the practice, honed and understood through study and contemplation which practitioners often describe as the development of spaciousness. However, this is not a smooth process with any guarantees. It is challenging and often feels futile in the wake of the violent storms of emotions that can overtake one out of the blue. The second point is that integrating all of
one's experience - even dreams can be approached after sufficient practice in an awake manner - is essential to one's greater arc of spiritual development.

To return to the description of the practice of shamatha, through observation a practitioner is able to recognize the manifestations of confused beliefs that present themselves often as emotional attachment to a sense of self. This recognition provides an opportunity to let go of these beliefs and thus to stop the emotional responses that they lead to. These responses are loosely grouped into three categories, sometimes called the three kleshas (klesha is also the word used for negativity or confusion which generates emotions) or three poisons: passion, the drive to bring things into our circle of self identity; aggression, the attempt to defend this territory; and ignorance, the attempt to ignore anything that cannot be attacked or brought into our territory. These three drives are said to be found in the vast majority of our acts, in differing amounts and in differing strengths.

It is important to bear in mind that the point of studying these teachings is not to come to accept them as the truth. It is constantly emphasized in Buddha dharma that each practitioner should not accept as dogma or delivered revelation the descriptions of the nature of mind and of existence, but instead should practice and see for themselves if there is truth there or not. The teachings on form and emptiness are descriptions of the nature of existence, while those such as the three poisons are about the dynamics of how mind functions in these conditions. As such they can be debated and understood intellectually, and the fine points can be discussed as to their ramifications as well as their accuracy and applications to specific situations. However, it is not enough to simply understand them. If one simply develops an intellectual understanding of the arguments without carrying out the practices, it is said that there is a danger of developing a kind of uber-ego.
The reason to study the arguments is to be able to develop a more precise understanding of one's experience in both meditation and post-meditation, and then to be able to share the fruition of one's insight with others to help alleviate their suffering. Simply accepting the teachings without examining their validity through direct experience in practice and through contemplation of one's experience in the moments either during or after formal practice, misses the essential quality of working with one's confusion. The main point here is that one must come to one's own realization - no one else can give it to you. The root problem of the misguided belief in the nature of self-identity is so pervasive and subtle that techniques of observation - the practices - are necessary to work with the actual manifestations in the moment. The seed of an act of aggression can manifest in a fraction of a second, far too short a duration to even observe with an untrained mind, let alone work with. For most of us, we can only work with our minds after the emotion-based activities have begun, and I would suspect that most people are as familiar as I am with the feeling that they may be aware that an act isn't what they would aspire to, but they couldn't help themselves. Even if they are able to stop the activity, the fact that base desires and impulses do arise can in itself be troubling. This is not to say that meditation and the other practices are panaceas that will overcome our difficulties, but rather that they are a set of tools that with discipline and gentleness will be of invaluable assistance.

The practices provide an opportunity to observe our minds over many years and to see the confusion that arises as well as the suffering caused by the confusion. A traditional analogy for the process is that of the clouds obscuring the sun. The wind is the practices which blow away the clouds/confusion which then allows one to see the sun/live without the interference of confusion and suffering. This condition could be considered to be a description of the state of enlightenment. If there is an ultimate goal to Buddhism, this is it. However, it is
not a goal in the sense that one can then own or in any way possess the state. It is rather that one can exist without confusion. In other words the goal is not an end, but rather a continuation, while enlightenment is not something one creates or develops, but rather is one's ordinary mind, free of confusion.

Stages Along the Path: the Three Yanas

The fifth element that I wish to present is that of the three stages of the path called the three yanas. Yana is a Sanskrit word meaning vehicle. The three yanas are the Hina (lesser) yana, the Maha (greater) yana, and the Vajra (adamantine or unbreakable) yana. These terms are also used to categorize distinct traditions such as the Zen tradition which is one of the mahayana sects, and the different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism which are in the vajrayana. The Theravadin (school of the elders) tradition which includes the Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka and much of South East Asia, is sometimes called the Hinayana, but this is a derogatory usage meant to imply that there are limitations to the tradition. In my sangha of Tibetan Buddhism, the three yanas are used to represent stages and connected practices and teachings, rather than simply a comment on the Theravadin form of Buddhism and it is made very clear that Theravadin Buddhism is not to be dismissed as a lesser vehicle.

In the Hinayana, the main practice is that of shamatha/vipashyana. The stage is one of simplifying and clarifying the understanding of one's experience on a personal level. Through the practices, one sees the endless working of ego and the confusion that it gives rise to. The main object of the practices at this level is to recognize the confusion and to loosen the hold of the confused beliefs; in other words, to see that the belief in a single, lasting, permanent self has no basis, and that it causes suffering. The mahayana builds on these experiences and
practices of the Hinayana. One of the results of recognizing the role of ego and the resulting suffering in oneself is that compassion for others arises. This is supported through the recognition that our identities are porous and that the suffering of others is connected with our own suffering, both causally and empathetically. That is to say that our own confusion creates suffering for others through the actions of aggression, passion and ignorance, while the same is true for others' confusion. If one limits one's practice to one's own enlightenment, there can develop a form of selfishness that is related to the ignorance klesha. Thus one of the main practices in the Mahayana is tonglen, the practice of exchanging self for other.

In tonglen, one takes on the suffering of others and in return gives love and compassion. This is done through visualization wherein one visualizes someone that one knows who is in pain or is involved in one's experience of aggression, passion or ignorance. In the visualization, one brings into oneself the negative emotions and sends out feelings of peace, love and compassion. There are specific stages to the practice that must be learned from a meditation teacher, and that require dedicated practice. Whether or not there is any effect on the other person is a side issue, although it is said that there is an effect. The immediate and key effect of the practice is to reverse the habitual tendency to think of one's own pleasure at the expense of others. One experience I have had is that letting go of my own drive to make myself happy, even for an instant - can allow me to see the enormous amount of effort I put into pleasing myself, and how this effort directly creates more suffering for me through my territoriality. Through reversing this process, there is less to struggle for, and so, through the resulting spaciousness and clarity, I am better able to enjoy life and avoid harming myself or others.
From the clarity of the Hinayana, one moves on to the compassion of the Mahayana. From the compassion of the Mahayana which further illuminates the ways in which we construct and defend our egos, one enters the Vajrayana. Another way to look at the process is that in the Hinayana one develops an understanding of the emptiness of oneself and through the Mahayana one develops an understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena. This is a key step in entering the Vajrayana, also called the Tantric path. Another way to talk about the process is the development of wisdom and compassion, two essential attributes on the Buddhist path. Wisdom is understanding the nature and functioning of ego, and is necessary if one is to work skillfully with life situations as they arise. Compassion is the development of gentleness and loving understanding towards oneself as well as others; it gives rise to the motivation to benefit other sentient beings, which arises organically as the practitioner comes to understand the oppressive confusion of ego-based actions and the interconnectedness of all phenomena. Compassion also serves to keep the practitioner involved with other sentient beings rather than withdrawing from the world. This engagement provides opportunities to further hone one’s insight and skillfulness at working with situations. Wisdom, compassion and skillful means are called prajna, karuna and upaya, and the terms often arise in conversations as practitioners discuss their practice and their activities off the meditation cushion.

In the Vajrayana, there are many thousands of practices, most of which are called sadhanas. In most tantric lineages, one practices sadhanas after having completed the four preliminaries, or the ngondro. These practices prepare the practitioner by clarifying and strengthening the relationship with the guru, providing further development of the mahayana aspiration of working for the benefit of others, and generally bringing up aspects of one’s resistance to practice
and to relating directly with experience. The final point of relating directly to experience pertains to the desire to generate and solidify storylines and projections, as opposed to resting in one's awareness and the sharpness that is experienced when one is not seeking the comforts of pleasure and avoiding pain. It is remarkable how many strategies one's mind can come up with to seek comfort, and these tactics come into sharp highlight during the ngondro.

Once the ngondro are completed, the sadhanas are practiced. As I mentioned, there are many thousands of sadhanas. In my sangha, the traditional progression is to do vajrayogini after the ngondro and then chakrasamvara. After these here are a number of choices and directions a practitioner can take depending on their interests and the recommendations of their guru. I considered describing these practices in detail in this thesis, but decided that the description would be complex and in the end would probably provoke more complexities than necessary, as tantric practice demands a subtle understanding of the nature of mind that develops with practice and study. Furthermore, the view or philosophical and existential understanding of mind matures and shifts as one completes different stages of training. However, a brief explanation might be helpful. A sadhana is a practice that involves mantras - the recitation of a set of syllables, and a visualization of a deity that embodies a state of enlightened mind, usually a particular psychological phenomena such as compassion or clarity. From an exoteric perspective, they appear to be a pantheon of deities, many of which were borrowed from traditional Hinduism or from the indigenous Tibetan shamanistic tradition called Bon. The esoteric understanding is that through the sadhanas, the practitioner takes on the enlightened qualities of the deity and brings them into their life.
An understanding of form and emptiness is necessary in order to engage in these practices. It is said that the Hinayana path is like walking along a road - if one falls, it is not a big deal. The Mahayana path is like riding in a car - the danger is greater - while the Vajrayana path is like riding in an airplane - if there is a problem, the consequences are dire. The problems warned of are that of forgetting, or of not understanding, the teaching of form and emptiness in application to the practices. In the Mahayana, if one uses the practices to bolster one’s ego; if one thinks of oneself as a great compassionate being, the result could be a strengthening of one’s ego and thus of confusion. Likewise in the Vajrayana, if one actually believed that one was becoming a deity, if one’s ego took possession of the deity, the resulting ego would be monstrous and even harder to work with. That is not to say that the deities have no existence other than simply something that one dreams up in one’s mind. However, what exactly constitutes existence has become a much richer consideration by this point in the path. Certainly the existence of a deity in a sadhana does not have the same qualities as the existence of a human, however the existence of a human has already been seen to be not quite the same as one’s actions would lead one to believe.

The point of the discussion is not to discuss the understanding of the reality or non-reality of the deities, or the qualities that could describe the existence. Nor is the point to argue at this time about the validity of the understanding or the efficacy of the practices. In my own practice of all three yanas, I have found that the practices have an effect, and that the effect is at least similar to that described in the texts. The point here is that the practices are deemed helpful, in combination with study and contemplation, if one is interested in working with one’s mind and one’s environment, and that the
teachers who participated in this research found that in their experience they were in fact helpful.
Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the fundamental elements of Buddhism. These elements were: the integrated function of study, contemplation and practice; the three jewels, or the Buddha as an example, the dharma as the teachings, and the sangha as the community of practitioners; the four noble truths as a pithy description of the basis for, and aims of Buddhism; the ontological and epistemological framework of Buddhism as presented through the teachings on form and formlessness; the role and function of the various practices, as well as some discussion of Buddhist psychology such as the three kleshas; and finally a mapping out of the three stages of the Vajrayana path.

For a discussion of some issues pertaining to Buddhism in North America, please see appendix I. In that appendix, I present some issues in modern, Western Buddhism, including some of the tensions and issues that have arisen in North America such as racial divisions and arrogance and the question that have arisen regarding of the applicability of certain aspects of Vajrayana Buddhism such as the role of the guru.

There have been many new terms, and I am afraid a fairly dense presentation of Buddhist teachings. If the going has been rough, please remember that as I mentioned in the introduction, it is a lot to digest in one reading. In my own experience, I seldom really digest this kind of information until I have gone over it a few times, or I have read stories that express it through their narratives. It is my hope that the narratives and the analysis chapters will do just that.
Chapter Five: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter on methodology will involve five sections. In the first section I will discuss the process of choosing a methodology as a general introduction to how I came to select narrative as the methodology for this research. In the second section, I will discuss narrative as a methodology, as well as the resonant use of stories in spirituality in general as a means of conveying teachings. I will also discuss my own appreciation of stories and literature and the applicability of narrative as a means of sharing teacher knowledge. The epistemological and ontological similarities and differences between narrative methodology and Buddhism will also be examined. In the third section I will discuss why I came to examine my sangha. The fourth section will briefly touch on why one of the common methodologies used in exploring issues in spirituality, namely phenomenology, was not used in this study. In the fifth section I will address specific issues of methods used in the research, and then in the final section specifics about the research as it took place.
Choosing a Methodology

In actual chronological order, I had already chosen my area of research prior to having studied research methodology. Therefore, my search for a way to present my work took place through an examination of research traditions in the light of my area of interest. Being located within a research tradition has a number of layers of implications. On the surface, it means that one follows certain methods for the gathering and final presentation of what is traditionally called data. There is the basic split between quantitative and qualitative research. After this basic decision has been made (for me, qualitative inquiry is the orientation of choice), there are a multitude of choices of research traditions available. Underlying these decisions are the various epistemological and ontological perspectives of the methodologies (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). There is also what is called a researcher’s “proclivities” (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). My choosing was an organic process based on the above factors in combination with the particular characteristics of my area of research and the ultimate goals I have for my research.

This process is also significant for the question of ‘when to locate’. The organic process would be unique to each researcher, even if their area is the same as mine, and so there is no necessary ‘should’ as to when to make the decision. That said, there are some important issues which are integral to the process which I shall now present through explaining how I chose narrative as the research tradition of my work.

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Narrative Traditions

Story in Narrative and Spirituality

The first issue to be discussed is the role of story in narrative and in my area of research, and the goal I have for my research. As stated in the previous chapters, I believe that spiritual/contemplative practices can be of assistance to teachers in their work. I would like my work to help teachers understand these possibilities and, if they so choose, to explore them. Narrative, as a research tradition which values storytelling, has roots in a variety of disciplines such as history, the arts, and psychology and psychotherapy (Polkinghorne, 1988). The flexibility and breadth of this lineage resonates with the tradition of storytelling found in all religious traditions as a method of sharing spiritual wisdom (Feldman and Kornman, 1991; Miller, Cassie and Drake, 1990). The tradition of ‘midrash’, or the reinterpretation of Old Testament stories have been used by Rabbis for centuries, a tradition taken up by Kafka and Kierkegaard in this century (Barna, 1996). Cajete, a Native American scholar speaking not only of the spiritual role of story states that: “They teach us how to live fully through reflection on, or participation in, the uniquely human cultural expressions of community, art, religion, and adaptation to a natural environment. The myths we live by actively shape and integrate our life experience” (Cajete, 1994, p. 116). From Jataka tales of the previous incarnations of the Buddha, to the stories in Genesis, story-telling has had a central role spiritual traditions.
Personal and General Power of Stories and the Applicability of Narrative as a Method for this research

The above recognition of the traditional role of story in spirituality compliments my personal love for stories. I have always loved literature and have found that I am able to learn more on both a theoretical as well as a personal level through material presented in story form. In my classroom teaching as well as my spiritual practice, stories that I have heard and read have stayed with me and provided inspiration. Reading Vivian Paley’s stories such as “The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter” (Paley, 1990) on narrative in education was highly influential in my teaching, as has been reading the lives of the early lineage holders in my tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Sherab Kohn’s life of the historical Buddha (Kohn, 1994) and the hagiographies of Vajrayana mahasiddhas or saints (Dowman, 1988) for my spiritual practice. Thus, what Glesne and Peshkin called my personal proclivities have influenced my choice of narrative. Further to this point, I do not feel that I am alone in my appreciation for stories. While different people find different forms of presentation inspiring, I believe that stories are a universal and powerful means, one that is reflected in the above discussed ubiquitous presence of story in religious traditions. I also believe that one should capitalize on one’s interests and abilities. In other words, if stories inspire me, I should bring that inspiration and joy to my work through using stories in the presentation of my work.

As will be seen in the narrative and analysis chapters, the teacher/practitioners often embedded their explanations of spiritual insights and the effect these insights had on their teaching, in stories. They told stories of how they first encountered the dharma, as well as the various epiphanies they experienced through their practice and in their life experience. Examples of
experiences they had with spiritual teachers as well as stories they told about these teachers all took on greater significance and resonance when told with story elements such as characters, events that unfolded in real time and in situations which contextualized both the events that were resolved, into which insight was gained, and sometimes the challenges they had yet to overcome. Furthermore, listening to the stories, I was better able to empathize with the story teller, bringing my life experience to the story and seeing its applicability to my own experience.

In the same way that stories provide a vehicle for multi-valent richness in spirituality, allowing the recipient of the story to digest the meanings over a lifetime, in the context of teaching, stories seem to be particularly appropriate. Ayers, mentioned in chapter two, wrote of the fluid nature of teacher-knowledge saying: “Much of what I know of teaching is tentative, contingent, and uncertain. I learned it by living it, by doing it, and so what I know is necessarily ragged and rough and unfinished.” (Ayers, 1993, p. xi). He too chose narratives as the means best suited to present his “tentative” and “contingent” insights in an accessible and powerful form. As Kathy Carter wrote in “The Place of Story in the Study of Teaching and Teacher Education” (Carter, 1993), “Teaching is intentional action in situations, and the core knowledge teachers have of teaching comes from their practice, i.e., from taking action as teachers in classrooms. Teachers’ knowledge is, in other words, event structured (Carter and Doyle, 1987), and stories, therefore would seem to provide special access to that knowledge.” (Carter, 1993, p. 7).

Just as the application of spiritual insight takes place in real-life situations, rife with ambiguity, multiple interpretations often not fully explored and digested for years, and also given to different interpretations by listeners and readers, so teacher knowledge defies reduction to “abstract rules, logical
propositions, or the covering laws of scientific explanation.” (Carter, 1993, p. 6). Another way of saying this is that I would not want to position myself as having the correct interpretation or understanding of a story, and I would suggest that even the teacher/participants’ lived experience of the stories they shared with me may change with time. By presenting the stories as stories, and not in quantified from, and in the context of a larger narrative wherein I attempt to use as much as possible the actual words the teachers spoke, I have tried to maintain this life-like quality, leaving the reader free to continue the process.

Often the stories elicited a response of a story from my experience which not only provided an opportunity for me to demonstrate that I understood the points they were making, but also provided a vehicle for examining different perspectives or nuances of the particular points they were making. This kind of rich dialectic exchange would not have been possible without the multi-leveled communication that takes place through the exchange of stories.

Epistemological and Ontological Consistency Between Narrative and Buddhism

I am, as I stated, a Buddhist. So far, it is my experience that the epistemological and ontological tenets of Buddhism are accurate, and that the practices are helpful for deepening one’s understanding and experience of those tenets. At the same time, I take the research process seriously enough to not want to make a game out of playing logical positivist in one situation, structuralist in another, and post-modernist in another. I want to develop a body of work that is consistent and which deepens, along with my insight, into both education and existence.
Given the traditional and personal power of narrative as discussed above, it is still necessary to consider its epistemological and ontological underpinnings to ensure that the stated goals for my research, my personal beliefs, and the philosophical underpinnings of Buddhism do not conflict. All of these are brought into my narrative research and all influence knowledge claims, arguments and reflections or suggestions that arise from the research. Therefore their structures and tenets should be examined vis-a-vis each other in order to avoid any future incongruities which could undermine the research. In so doing, I recognize that if I was to research another spiritual tradition, I would have to consider the specific epistemological and ontological claims of that tradition. However, as I stated above, there is at least a recognition of the power of stories in many spiritual traditions.

Narrative

The narrative work of Connelly and Clandinin is grounded in the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey and in narrative psychology such as the work of Jerome Bruner (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, 1996). In Dewey’s pragmatism, experience is the central basis for analysis and knowledge claims (Dewey, 1916, 1938). His approach to education and research wherein he argues that “education, experience and life” are inextricably interwoven reflects this emphasis on experience (Dewey, cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p. 415). It also emphasizes the need for a researcher to maintain a consistency between the various elements in their lives. Another way of saying this, is that if I practice Buddhism and find the Buddhist perspectives and teachings to be persuasive, I should ensure that my approach to research and teaching is consistent with the tenets of the Buddhism that I practice. In this way, life experience can be seen as a
continuum of experience with the various areas of activity having qualitative differences at the relative or form level, but at the same time recognizing the presence of ultimate truth, or the luminous emptiness of form, in the integration of the various manifestations of experience. As I will discuss in the analysis chapter, allowing the various elements of one’s life to influence each other is a powerful aspect of a spiritual approach to life, and one which Dewey’s statement above supports.

Bruner’s narrative psychology presents the paradigmatic and narrative “intelligences” or “modes of cognitive functioning” (Bruner, 1987, 1991). The narrative mode is one which “displays purpose and direction in human affairs and makes individual human lives comprehensible as wholes” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.18). Narrative psychologists maintain that humans are storytelling creatures, that the way we construct our worlds and the way we experience lives are storied (Bruner, 1987, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988). In other words, if studying the narrative mode of cognitive functioning is a way to gain access to experience as our experience of life is storied, then stories would also be an appropriate form in which to present the material (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Bruner, 1987, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988).

**Buddhism: Stories and Relative Truth**

In Buddhist terms, the narrative mode of cognition could be said to be related to relative truth. There is a recognition in Buddhism that we construct storylines to understand our experience. In so doing, we also reify our experience which presents obstacles to experiencing the ultimate level of truth. It is not so much the act of naming that is the problem, but that we relate to the named objects as if they had a “lasting, single and independent” reality.
(Gyamtso, 1988). It is important to understand how this storied experience operates and how it serves to obstruct understanding, as well as to provide insight into how to develop greater clarity and the other characteristics discussed in the introduction as relating to spiritual practices. Stories, both our own and others', can provide glimpses of ultimate truth or at least prepare us for such glimpses. The actual practices themselves serve to stabilize and develop those glimpses into deeper insight.

In meditation, the basic process is to follow the out breath and remain open during the in breath. Thoughts that occur are labeled as ‘thinking’ and not evaluated as good, bad, interesting, useful, etc.; they are simply labeled as thinking and one returns to the breath. The reason for this is that from a Buddhist perspective, the storylines that occur as thoughts during meditation are conceptual structures that distract the meditator from relating to experience directly. Relating directly to experience without conceptual interference is the key process in developing insight into the nature of reality. That said, the thoughts themselves are not necessarily the problem. It is one’s relationship with the thoughts that is at issue. Thoughts occur to practitioners at almost every level of training. Problems arise when we reify the thought and consider it to be the final statement on a given issue or about a given phenomenon.

Storylines should not be considered the sole source of truth or meaning, but only as one relative venue for working with our minds. Relative truth is not considered to be simply an obstacle. It is the material with which we work on a daily basis. Most practices have elements which work with relative truth. Even the emotions that arise from solidification can be used as skillful means to observe and spiritually deconstruct the solidification of relative truth.

In Buddhism, there is the understanding that one shouldn’t simply accept the teachings, but rather one should study them, contemplate them and practice
the disciplines in order to experience the truth that the words point to. In this context, one would expect that individual practitioners would have differing opinions and experiences of the Buddhist teachings, and I have heard other practitioners disagreeing with and questioning the teachings.

It is worth taking a moment to consider the application of Eck's pluralist response to spiritual dialogue (Eck, 1993). Her work, while ostensibly concerning spiritual issues, at heart is about how to listen to, and benefit from, other's beliefs and experiences. In research, the question is how to faithfully report these insights and experiences. Narrative can be seen as a way of striving to allow the participants' voices to be clearly present to the reader through making the writers position clear, as any filter such as the researcher/writers has an effect on the presentation; and through recognizing the way in which stories reflect the participants' experiences as authentically as possible. In other words, remembering that the point of this research is not to convince either the readers or the teacher/participants of any particular interpretation of Buddhism, then narrative should serve to provide a means for presenting diversity of opinion without undermining the basis for its own claims to methodological efficacy.

An epistemological view in which the means for presenting the research is based on the relative level of truth, or the stories we construct, allows the nuances of each person's understandings to be present in their own words. Furthermore, as my experience effects the presentation, my position and effect on the process is made clearer through the stories that I share. The claims made in Buddhism about ultimate truth and an individual's ability to experience this, need not conflict with relative truth or the significance of stories as vehicles for conveying meaning.

Some narrativists might dispute the veracity or the effect of meditative practice as a means of experiencing absolute truth, or even the veracity of
absolute truth as an analysis of reality. However, I believe that as long as I strive to present the stories as clearly as possible, while also making my position clear, any claims at the absolute level are nested and tempered through the epistemological context of the resonance of narrative and relative truth, or the human tendency to construct their realities and make sense of their experience through stories. For a Buddhist practitioner, seeing through the confusion of our solidified projections that make-up our egos or identities is a central aspect of the practice. In my opinion, narrative, through its exploration of the storied nature of human experience, has the least reified assumptions regarding identity. Therefore, when I now state that I agree that our experience of life is largely storied and that therefore stories are an appropriate form in which to present my research (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Bruner, 1987, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988), the context is, I hope, clear: stories are a part of relative truth and as such they can be worked with productively.
Examining my Sangha

Given that I am not attempting to convert the readers, it is necessary to explain why I am using members of one sangha as opposed to a number of sanghas or even members of other religions.

Commitment Restraints

The first reason is that for a thesis of this kind, the number of participants that can be involved is limited. Four participants as well as myself would be the outside limit for a narrative thesis of this nature. Given this limitation, I was left with the option of dividing the members among different traditions, or keeping it to my sangha. There were two deciding factors that affected my choice: The first was the difficulty in finding members of other traditions who were willing to commit the time and energy necessary to take part in the study. It is worth noting that in today’s educational and political climate, teachers are pressed to give ever more time to their work. In speaking to teachers from different traditions I kept hearing that they would love to participate, but that given the time involved in interviews and observations, they could not commit. Faced with this problem, I rethought the focus of the study. There were four teachers from my sangha who were interested and willing to participate, and so I gratefully accepted their offers to participate.
Familiarity

The second reason why working with teachers from my sangha was appropriate and helpful is that as I used narrative methods in the study, the pre-existing relationships helped to ensure the kinds of trusting relationships that narrative research depends on. As I have known all the participants for periods ranging from one to twelve years, there was good reason to hope for the communication to start at a deeper level than if I was just a researcher 'off the street'. Gudmundsdottir has written on the difference between stories told to researchers for research purposes, and those told spontaneously to fellow teachers (Gudmundsdottir, 1991). From a research perspective, the difference could be significant, depending on the levels of trust and nature of the triggering of the memory, especially given the fluid quality of stories as they are retold over the years. I would not pretend that the interviews I held evoked the same stories that would occur in natural settings, but I do feel that as I had established relationships with each of the participants, I came as close to hearing stories that are told “not to strangers” (Morgan, 1992, cited in Carter, 1993).
One Final Point: Why Narrative and not Phenomenology

Another methodology that has been used to explore spirituality is phenomenology. However, if this were a phenomenological study, there would certainly be some kind of mapping or rigorous comparative analysis of the actual experiences of the participants focusing largely on drawing out universal, or at least 'common to the participants', experiences (Peters, 1989, Hanna, 1993; Walsh, 1995). This was not attempted for the following reasons: First, there were only five participants including myself. That is not enough of a sample upon which to base claims of universality. Differences such as length of time spent practicing, regularity and intensity of practice, age, ethnicity, gender, class and national background are too complex to ignore. However, this is somewhat of a side issue. The main reason for not attempting a phenomenological study was that it was not part of my agenda to construct an experiential comparison.

I wish to present stories as authentically as possible and allow the readers to make their own connections, both to the practices and religions, and to the participants. Occasional similarities and contrasts did arise, but they are embedded in the narratives and were not arrived at through interview techniques such as bracketing and reduction as found in phenomenological research methods (VanManen, 1990; Hanna, 1993). In the analysis, I will discuss differences and similarities with the aim of illustrating the point made earlier about the unique qualities of any individual's path, along with the commonalities that exist, and not in order to develop a stage theory of spiritual development.
Methods

At heart, the methodology I used can be described as having some good conversations - both oral and written - with teachers about the interpenetration of their spiritual and professional lives, and then observing them in action to see how things actually play out. This is especially significant in view of Morgan’s stress on stories that are told “not to strangers.” (Morgan, 1991, cited in Carter, 1993). There was a feeling in most of the interviews of just sitting around with friends and fellow sangha members and chatting about topics that interested us as teachers and practitioners. That said, there are some important issues that must be addressed. Again, consistency between research and spiritual practice is for me essential. Miller’s description of contemplation as being the ‘development of compassionate attention’ is a good place to begin considering methods (Miller, 1994). Heshusius’ call for ‘participatory consciousness’ reflects this approach. Rather than trying to “manage subjectivity” (Heshusius, 1994), or “tame” it (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992), Heshusius calls for an approach that transcends the dichotomies of researcher/participant, and self/other. In Buddhist terms, Heshusius is calling for a recognition of absolute or universal truth in the Buddhist sense to inform our work on the level of relative truth. This call is made in the recognition of the fundamental interconnection of researcher and participants, just as among all sentient beings and even phenomena in general. It is my experience that spiritual practices promote this way of being with others, but this is an on-going process that proceeds hand-in-hand with the development of my research skills.

Personal experience methods (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994) including narrative interviews with their unstructured approach, journaling, family stories,
memory boxes, autobiographical writing and openness to experimentation with narrative form all provide possibilities for overcoming the split between researcher and participants. However, in my research I found that the participants did not have the time engage in most of these processes. I suggested that we exchange journals, but the teachers made it clear that they were too busy, or simply uninterested in the journaling. I also found that the discussions we had in the interviews were rich enough without using tools such as memory boxes and photographs, especially as it was clear to me that the teachers were already being generous in their gifts of their time given the enormous pressure they were working under in this time of cut-backs in funding and classroom preparation time.

I did observe all but one of the participants’ classrooms. (In the one case, the process of getting board approval was not resolved until after the research was completed.) As it was, the observations acted more as an opportunity for me to get a feeling for the context in which their stories took place, and gave rise to material which we discussed in the interviews. At the end of the research process, I felt that the interviews and observations, combined with the already existing relationships as friends and fellow practitioners was enough to help me provide my readers with a “thick” (Bogdan and Bilken, 1982) description of the actual events, one that provides as rich a reconstruction of the events as possible, including my own presence in the research process (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). As I stated before, I hope that readers will be able to place themselves in the teachers’ situations - to feel the events as they transpired while also recognizing the effect of my presence in the work.

Within the narrative research tradition, there is a great degree of flexibility as to the final presentation of research. The distinction is made between a narrative analysis and an analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995) In the first
case, narrative means are used to research and present the final work, while in the second case, the narratives are analyzed using various techniques. My use of narrative is related to narrative analysis in that what I wanted was a research tradition that valued stories, and an approach to interaction between the researcher and the participants that recognized the value of dialogue or exchanging stories, rather than a more traditional approach wherein the researcher is constrained from sharing their experience with the participant during the research.

Research such as that of Ming Fang He which combined both forms of analysis and also explored alternative means such as constructing pastiche personas out of the stories of her participants in response to the political danger of openly identified criticisms of their home country of China (He, 1998, unpublished thesis), as well as narrative combined with quantitative analysis as in the research of Michael Huberman (Huberman, 1995), indicate the degree of freedom available in crafting final research presentations. However, I did not press the boundaries of traditional presentation in this thesis as will be seen in the next chapters.
One step Back...

In my sangha there are many practices taught, each with its purposes and particular applications. Some provide ways to raise one’s energy in the moment through short exercises that may take only a few seconds or minutes. Others are daily practices that may take up to a few hours or longer. They are seen as a variety of skillful ways with which one can work with one’s state of mind to be more present in the moment, in an energized, uplifted manner. This description is understandably vague - energized and uplifted could mean different things to different people. Part of the purpose of the study is to unpack the meaning of such terms as well as other terms that are used to describe the experiences through specific examples embedded in narratives of the teachers’ lives.

At the heart of Buddhism is the understanding that the practices and the teachings regarding the nature of mind and how one works with mind and environment, must be understood personally. In other words, it is not about simply understanding a doctrine or dogma, but about experiencing existence. This entails using the practices as a means to experience existence directly and clearly. This can only happen if individual practitioners take up terms such as energized and uplifted and infuse them with meaning based on their own experience in every aspect of their lives. Another aspect of this point is that the practices are not moments of experience isolated from the rest of experience, but rather serve to provide skillful ways to work with all of one’s experience.

How does this affect the kinds of questions that will be asked in the study? The first part of the answer is that the questions will seek to provide ways for the teachers to present their experience. Depending on their understanding
of Buddhism, they may not even view the teachings in the manner I have described. For example, they may be trying to impose a predetermined sense of uplifted into their lives based on what they feel is expected of them. Therefore, I did not start with the terms and ask of their meaning in the teachers’ lives.

**Encounters, Questions and Schedule**

During the interviews, the conversations were interactive. If the participant asked questions of me, then I answered them and they became a part of the stories that make up the final presentation. Sometimes I volunteered information that I thought would be relevant, and sometimes I engaged in discussions about the teachings or about practice related issues simply because the participant seemed to want or need to talk about those things. I feel that this approach was in keeping with Heshusius’ participatory consciousness (Heshusius, 1994). It is also an approach to research that arose from feminist scholarship in an attempt to avoid the traditional objectification of interviewees (Oakley, 1981). In Oakley’s work, this was also meant to validate the subjective experience of the participants. The main reason for the interactive interviews was to foster a sense of openness and genuine presence. To be concise about the point, I found that if I was open to their questions and forthright in my responses, they found it easier to do the same.

The research process took approximately two months. There were initial one-on-one interviews with each participant during which biographical information about their teaching careers and their practice histories were discussed. Broad, ‘starting point’ questions were asked such as: how and why did you first begin practicing; what practices are you engaged in; how do you feel they influence/affect you, if at all; and how, why and when do they influence or
arise in your teaching; when did you start teaching; what other experiences did you have with children and teaching; why did you chose to be a teacher; and questions about their experiences in teaching. These were followed by one week intervals during which the participants had the opportunity to contemplate the discussion in the context of their on-going teaching.

The one-week intervals were followed by another round of one-on-one interviews which focused on the actual relationship between their spiritual practice and classroom teaching. The interviews were open to both specific stories of the application of what might be called Buddhist inspired or influenced teaching, as well as more conceptual philosophical and psychological perspectives. However, the questions were open-ended to allow the participants to relate their stories as much as possible in their own ways. Questions from the first interviews were revisited and discussed in the light of the opportunity to compare the initial responses with actual situations they experienced in the classroom. There was an emphasis on actual examples of how the teachers experienced the relationship between teaching and practice. Examples of the kinds of open ended questions used include: last week you described such-and-such experience, do you find any similarities or dissimilarities in your teaching; you mentioned term ‘X’ last week, would you use it in reference to your teaching, when, why, what contributes to it/detracts from it; can you tell me some stories about your teaching which relate to story ‘X’ that you told me last week?

After the two initial interviews, I carried out a series of classroom observations and interviews. Each observation was followed by an interview, usually on the same day or within a few days of the observation. The observations and interviews fed into each other providing concrete examples of the applications of teaching practices and approaches to teaching that resonated
with the examples and theories put forward by the teachers during the interviews. The observations were also open to foci that were not mentioned in the interviews.

Toward the end of the research, a group discussion such as those carried out by Michele Fine in: "Over Dinner, Feminism and Adolescent Female Bodies" was held (Fine, 1992). This was non-hierarchical and oriented toward the needs of the participants rather than to a previously decided thesis-related topic, although at around the middle of the session I did bring up a topic that I was interested in exploring. I feel that the act of coming together as teacher-meditators provided rich material for the research as well as for the teachers. The participants have all told me how they enjoyed the research - most importantly how it helped them bring their practice into their classrooms through both reminding them of the possibility, and by helping them to contemplate the ways in which they could apply the teachings and the practices.

Transcripts, field notes from the observations and discussion group, and impromptu exchanges occurring in the normal routine of relationships at our meditation Center were used to construct stories of the interpenetrating qualities of the classroom experience and the spiritual practices. Recognizing Dewey’s insistence that “education, experience and life” are inextricably interwoven, the stories include whatever aspects of the teachers’ lives they felt relevant (Dewey, cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p. 415).

The participants themselves are all teachers in the Toronto region. There were three men and one woman. For the purposes of this thesis, the men will be called David, Ron and Pierre, and the woman, Susan. At the time of the research, Susan was 50 years old and had taught all levels of high school for 25 years. She teaches Spanish, French, ESL, and Music and had been meditating for two years. Ron was 40 and had been teaching all subjects at grades two to five for eight
years, and had been meditating for four years. David was 46 and had been
teaching special education junior-behavioural for 21 years and had been
meditating for 20 years. Pierre was 45 and had been a teacher-librarian for 14
years. He had been meditating for 15 years.
This has been the last chapter before the actual narratives are presented. To review the steps I have taken in this chapter, I first discussed the process of choosing narrative as a methodology, paying particular attention to my interest in stories, and the traditional roll and power of stories in the transmission of spiritual traditions. Stories were seen as not only being a traditional vehicle of teaching in spiritual traditions, they were also seen to be useful in working with teacher knowledge. I discussed my perspective that Buddhist ontology and epistemology, based on spiritual practices which promote a direct relationship with experience while still valuing the relative, storied level of experience, have the potential to broaden the philosophical basis of narrative.

I then discussed the reasons for working within my community, as opposed to working with a variety of traditions. This discussion was followed by a brief section discussing why phenomenology, one of the most common methods for examining spiritual issues was not used. In the next section, I specified the particular methods used in the research, and the primacy of interviewing and observations. Given the time constraints that the present day political climate places on teachers, journals and other time-consuming processes were not used in the research. Drawing on the example of feminist researchers, I stressed the importance of an open-hearted and open-ended interaction with my participants. The final step in this chapter was to introduce the participants and provide some background information about age and subject area. And now, the next step is the narratives themselves.
Chapter Six: Narratives

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the narratives of the teacher/participants. Each section will begin with the teaching and practice history of the teacher, followed by a discussion of material that arose in the interviews. The narratives will include stories of teaching and meditation practice, but will not be limited to stories. In the interviews, some of the participants made the point that it is difficult to separate their meditation practice, their lives and their teaching, and sometimes the points they made were not presented in story form, or with stories as examples.

My approach to the interviews was - as I mentioned in the methodology chapter - quite chatty. I had some “starting point” questions, from which the discussions roamed freely. There were many times where the participants asked if they were on topic, and I found myself reassuring them that there wasn’t always a topic that I had in mind, but rather an approach which involved using the free ranging quality of the interview to bring up interesting topics. In general this approach was very productive as over the course of the hour and a half interviews we would often return to topics from different angles, bring to light aspects of the issues which loosened the solidity of initial thoughts. This process, combined with the already established bonds of friendship and sangha, provided a context where I did not need to direct the conversation as much as I would have if I had been following a rigorously prescribed list of questions, and the questions that I did have were explored in a rich and layered manner.
Another result of the approach was that the interviews had very personal characteristics. With each participant I have a different relationship which affected the kinds of discussions held. For example, with Susan, there was more of a sharing of my past experience, and I also felt free to have the discussion focus on questions she had about the sangha and about her practice. I purposefully did not take the position of dispassionate interviewer, but rather would sometimes even explain points of practice and dharma interpretation when I felt that she wanted to enter into such an exchange. I did this for two reasons. The first was that I felt that carrying out the interviews in a way that ignored her concerns would be selfish and an inappropriate response to her generosity in allowing me to observe her in her classroom and come to her house for the series of interviews, and the second reason was pragmatic in that the discussions often served to develop a trust that opened new areas for exploration.

With Pierre, there were only two interviews, and the discussions were more like old friends having a conversation which focused more on one person’s life. Pierre spoke mostly about the effects of practice, and the different practices he was involved with, while with David - with whom I had four interviews, the most of any participant - the discussions ranged widely, with a lot of time spent discussing special education issues, including more theoretical considerations. In David’s case, there was the added element that he was considering what he wanted to do the following year, and he was not sure that he wanted to continue being a teacher, let alone a special education teacher. One event that was representative of the power, and I think humanity of the approach I used is evoked in the following anecdote.

During a recess on an afternoon when I was a participant observer in his classroom, we were in the school playground watching the students. I asked him
if he was looking forward to the summer and he replied that he wasn’t because he knew that after the summer he would just be back in the classroom facing the same difficulties that had been growing over the past half decade. I will discuss some of these issues in his section, but for now, I will say that having been a special education teacher for eight years, he was one of the longest lasting teachers in the Toronto board and perhaps one of the most successful, but he had found his classroom had grown larger with more students who had greater difficulties and there was generally less support. In short, he was feeling a need for a change.

We discussed his response for a few minutes, but neither of us made too much of the point as it was representative of much that we had discussed up to then. However, the next day when we had the follow-up interview at his house, he told me that that moment had been particularly significant for him and had haunted him for the rest of the day. In fact, that night, after discussing it with his wife, he made the decision that he would not return to special education the following year, but would take a regular class. He added that the joy and relief he felt after the decision was so strong that he had stayed up half the night, unable to sleep as a result of being so excited about what he would do in a regular classroom. Rather than dismay at being a catalyst for change, I was honoured that I had been able to help him, in some small way, to make a life decision which obviously was so powerfully positive. He has taught in a regular classroom since the interviews and his energy and inspiration are a joy to behold.

The main point I want to make is that I did not approach the interviews with the attitude that I needed to get certain information from them. I also wanted to avoid simply getting responses that affirmed my beliefs as a Buddhist and a teacher. In this context, and given that I had some form of established
relationship with each participant, I felt it was best to promote as many 
meandering returnings, segues and apparent non-sequiturs as naturally arose.

The final point on this issue before diving into the first narrative is that 
with this approach I ended up with four hundred pages of tightly packed 
transcripts, a book of field notes from the participant observations and 
observations, and dozens of pages of after-interview notes. Based on this wealth 
of material, the narrative sections are not uniform presentations wherein I cover 
the same topics from the different perspectives of each participant. Instead I tried 
to present the heart issues that came up for each individual. Some of these were 
similar, and some issues were markedly different. Each narrative will therefore 
have different section headings to reflect the different issues raised with each 
participant. I strove to include as little interpretation as possible in the narrative 
sections, with the exception that sometimes there was a need to explain certain 
terms and practices, and of course I wrote in the first person when appropriate. I 
hope that my perspective and interests have been made clear enough to this 
point that the inevitable presence of the researcher, and the concomitant 
influence on the narratives at many levels does not have to apologized for. I also 
hope that this presence will be seen as an addition to the narratives, rather than a 
deficiency. And now it is time to begin the first narrative.
David: Teaching on the Front lines

I first met David in the early eighties, shortly after I started practicing meditation. I had done a weekend Shambhala program and he was the meditation instructor I was assigned. For the rest of the time I lived in Toronto, he continued to be my instructor, and then I would bump into him at Karme Choling, the rural practice center in Northern Vermont. When I returned to Toronto after six years, I got to know him as a colleague through administration work at the Shambhala center, and as a friend through sangha events and programs. I was delighted that he was willing to participate in the research, and as things worked out, had more interviews and observations with him than with any of the other participants.

During the period of the interviews, David was going through a challenging period in his life. He was at the end of eight years of being a special education teacher, and although we didn’t know it when we started the interviews, that would be his last spring working in that capacity. Partially as a result of this turbulent time in his life, our interviews had a deeply reflective quality wherein David provided me with a wonderful combination of direct practice and teaching related material, as well as a more theoretical overview of the interconnection of practice and teaching. It was in the interviews with David that I developed some of the most concrete understandings of the particular dynamics. But before discussing them, it is time to take a look at David’s teaching and practice history before the period of the interviews.
Practice and Teaching History

David was born in 1950 to a middle class family in Toronto. He remembers asking questions about his life and his place in the universe at an early age, and in his mid-teens he was reading books by authors such as Allan Watts “Eastern Spirituality”. While his early life was quite comfortable, he was nonetheless “looking for more, or different, something else whatever that meant.” In retrospect, David feels sees this sense of searching to have been the first steps to the dharma, although he didn’t know it at the time. In the mid-sixties, while in his mid-teens, he became involved in psychedelic drugs, “not so much to have a good time, but I used to read the “Tibetan Book of the Dead” before we dropped acid and we used to try to create some kind of spiritual environment to work with our minds .... so my whole take on the drug scene was to wake up.” David sees these early experiments with drugs as being connected to the writings of Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert.

Aside from the standard public schooling available in Toronto, he went to summer camp every year. In fact, he started at the age of four to attend overnight camps, and then for the rest of his life until he finished university, he spent on average two months at camp every year, an experience he very much enjoyed. As his family was affluent enough for him not to need to work in the summer, he was able to continue attending the camps and eventually in his later teens got jobs with responsibility and commensurate salaries. This early experience working with children would stand him in good stead in his first job as a parent paid employee at a school in down town Toronto.

David attended York University, starting in the late sixties and finishing in 1971. At that time, there was a lot of freedom at York to do what you wanted,
and David took “a lot of courses that were self evaluation, choose your own teacher, choose your own course, so basically I majored in dope smoking 101”. although he did graduate with a degree in sociology. There was also a professor at York who taught yoga and so David “started to do yoga with him as well as the psychedelic and dope smoking. While he was not a student of Namgyal Rinpoche, the Canadian born teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, he had a number of friends in the sangha, some of whom are still friends and later became members of the Shambhala sangha. When he graduated from York, he wasn’t ready to start work, and he “had never once thought about what to do for a living .... and that was sort of acceptable back then to just hang-out.” And so he followed a girl-friend to Boulder, Colorado where she was attending university, and continued his yoga practice, and eventually taught it when he came back to Toronto.

Boulder was “a spiritual supermarket. There was a lot going on there and so I tried a little bit of everything.” He “received knowledge from the Divine Light Mission Guy .... went to some transcendental meditation groups, and I also went to Wednesday night classes given by the young Tibetan guru, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche.” While his girlfriend at the time became more involved with the Tibetan tradition, David “started to get seriously into yoga.” However, David’s experience of Hinduism was problematic. He “felt like a sham, that I was dressing in whites and being holy and sneaking out at night to drink.” He told me of one occasion when he was back in Toronto where he saw some of his yoga students while he was in a bar. He “had to hide in the corner because I didn’t want them to see I wasn’t holy.” His understanding of Hinduism at the time was “purifying your vessel” which meant “being a vegetarian, doing yoga, thinking kind thoughts, [and] being a good person.” He readily admits now that he did not have access to the depths of Hinduism and yoga, but within the
context of what he understood, David found that he “couldn’t keep it up”. As a result of this dissonance, David describes his experience as having been one of “wearing it .... I tried to be holy and I tried to look holy.”

After a year in Boulder, David returned to Toronto. As already mentioned, he hadn’t thought about career or future, but as he told me: “A light went on, I went, oh yeah, I can be a teacher.” According to David, “If your grades were decent you could just apply to the faculty of education, you’d get in.” He also had the advantage of having worked with kids all his life, and his extra curricular resume was quite rich. “I had a lot of experience with kids and a lot of it was outside of school and they always liked that. I took kids on canoe trips, I was a good sailor .... I was good in sports, I had all those game playing kind of things.” After his year at the faculty of education, he was got a job in the Scarborough board in 1974 where he taught grade five for two years.

At the same time he read “Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism” by Trungpa Rinpoche which had come out just after he left Boulder, and was profoundly affected by the book. Although he had seen Rinpoche in Boulder and attended some classes, and he “knew he was the real thing .... but I couldn’t do it somehow.” At the time he had been deeply involved in the yoga practice and “couldn’t believe that being spiritual could be being whoever you were .... I thought you had to be someone else.” For the first time, David was reading about “working with your manure .... that you wouldn’t try to get rid of your shit, you know, you’d work with your shit and plant in it, and that completely blew my mind.” He carried the book around with him for months. In fact it hit home to such an extent that he felt that “somehow this man knew my mind and it actually completely freaked me out.” David was still doing his yoga practice, but he was becoming more drawn to Tibetan Buddhism through Trungpa Rinpoche’s writing.
After two years of teaching grade five, David wanted to do something else. "looking back on it once again I sort of can’t believe I did it, but for me two years was enough and I quit .... I wanted to do something else.” And so over the next two years, he went on a bike trip and then “hung out” some more. After this second period of hanging out and traveling, he returned to Toronto with a passion to “sink his teeth into teaching.” He told me that he “went through a lot in those years and realized that I wanted a career, I wanted to become a good teacher. I didn’t want to just hang out.” Unfortunately the job market had changed and there were no teaching jobs available at the time. In the end, he took a job as a parent paid employee at a bi-lingual school to do enrichment and remedial work for the entire school, a position he stayed with for the next ten years.

The years while David held this position was also the period during which he became a member of the Shambhala community. Before he started to practice, he tried all kinds of therapies and practices including primal therapy, bio-energetic and gestalt therapy, while also studying with Swami Vishnudevananda, Sri Chimnoy, Yogi Bhajan and others. He did “all these little workshops and things, so I was really shopping, but Trungpa Rinpoche was always in the back of my mind.” When I asked him if these work shops and practices were helpful he answered with a qualified no, in that they were “only helpful in the fact that they led me to Rinpoche and I tried every single aisle in the supermarket and kept coming back to him.” However, he still had great difficulty in just sitting and doing the shamatha practice. “Sitting was too painful, like actually sitting with myself and seeing my own mind was far too painful .... I would much rather do kundalini yoga, do something trippy .... or look holy, or do some kind of therapy.”
So what was behind all this shopping in the 'spiritual supermarket'? While we were discussing the various spiritual and therapeutic practices David had engaged with, he told me that he had basically been "completely miserable and confused." He later modified this statement, saying: "you know, not completely miserable, but really thinking there was something else, like this, I’m not happy .... there’s something the matter. I can have a good job if I want one, I have lots of friends, my family’s a good family, but there’s something else.” One of the last therapies he did was the primal therapy, and he really thought “primal therapy was it. Like once I did that I’d feel good about myself.” The woman that he went to for the primal therapy intensive spent the week telling him that there was nothing wrong with him, and trying to talk him into going with her husband on a trip down the Amazon. For David, each time he started a new therapy, he thought the feeling of discontent he had felt throughout his life would finally be resolved, and yet at the same time he couldn’t sit in shamatha for more than five minutes without shaking and having to stop. As he puts it: “I just didn’t want to see my mind.”

By the mid-seventies he had stopped dabbling in different disciplines and had accepted that the only thing that made sense was “what Trungpa Rinpoche had to offer which was shamatha practice.” Although he still had not been able to sit for more than five minutes, he went to Karme Choling, the retreat center in Vermont, and sat for a one week group meditation retreat called a ‘weekthun’. Although it was “the most excruciating experience of my life”, at the end of the week, he knew he wanted to come back for a month-long retreat, and he “knew that was it.” As he put it: “I basically began to see that the only way was to sit with myself, to be there and just experience me without trying to change it.”
Over the next three years David grew more involved in the center. He became a member when Trungpa Rinpoche visited Toronto and David wanted to be at the community meeting with Rinpoche. There were some blips along the way, largely as a result of a difficult relationship and out of disapproval of some of the “sexual impropriety in the early days of our center.” However, in 1980, he sat the month-long group retreat called a dathun, where he met his present wife, and since then has been “a serious practitioner.” He has “stopped looking anywhere else”, although he has in recent years developed an interest in his Jewish roots, but not to the extent of ending his Buddhist practice.

In 1983, David attended seminary at the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center. Seminary is a group retreat where practitioners alternate intensive ten day sessions of sitting meditation with the study of the hinayana, mahayana and vajrayana over a three month period, after which they are given a transmission and make a commitment to start the initial tantric practices called the four foundations, or ngondro in Tibetan. After seminary, David returned to Toronto and began the ngondro practices which can take from a few years to a lifetime to finish. He finished them in ten years - not very quickly but not an unheard of length of time. He is presently doing the vajrayogini sadhana and also practicing the werma sadhana from the Shambhala tradition. Soon after his return to Toronto he also began working in administrating the center and in teaching programs and giving meditation instruction. It was actually in 1985 that I first met David when he became my meditation instructor after my first Shambhala level earlier in the year. When I first began to work in administration at the center in the mid-nineties, David was still there administrating, teaching and giving meditation instruction to newcomers as well as to his regular meditation students. It is fair to say that along with a few other older students, David has
been one of the mainstays of the Shambhala center in Toronto and has given an incredible amount of time and energy to the place.

He saw the 17 years from seminary to the time of the interviews as having been fairly consistent. He made the observation that “It’s interesting that so much of what I’ve talked about was a very short period of my life [the period between university and joining the sangha which we discussed extensively] and the last 17 years there’s not much to say. I continued practicing .... and have thought of it as the best thing that ever happened in my life.” He describes himself as a “lazy practitioner in the classic sense that I don’t do an enormous amount of practice.” However, by practice, David meant formal sitting practice of shamatha/vipashyana and sadhanas. Although he was not entirely sure his view was “kosher” he said: “In my own mind I see my practice as being bigger than my own practice.” For David it was important to “make friends with the fact that doing administrative work, teaching, meditation instruction which I’ve been doing since 1983 and trying to be a good father, good husband, good worker at school is the reason I’m practicing.” In recent years, he has found that “when I’m pulled between my family and dharma, I find recently anyway that I chose family first because I see that as the reason I’m practicing.”

In David’s view, there have been changes over the years in our sangha in the priorities people have established. “I think a lot of people who practice misinterpret the teachings and can turn the teachings into an end so that [practice] becomes what they do on the cushion. I think the sangha has been negligent in some sense that a lot of people have chosen sitting over their children, over their relationships, over their jobs in some kind of misunderstanding of what the teachings are about.” He added that “to be fair to our particular sangha, our present teacher, the Sakyong, if I can read between the lines of what he’s saying, he’s saying that the same thing - that he wants our
sangha to be more mahayana, that we’ve been around long enough that practitioners are processed enough that maybe they can step out a little bit. And that seems to be happening in the major centers.”

The term ‘processed’ is an interesting one, and one that is used in our community quite often. David described it first by giving the traditional metaphor used by one of the old lineage holders - Milarepa - a slightly modern twist. “When you start practicing you have these big pieces of clay and rock and everything’s rock and keep roto-tilling, you keep working with the earth and things start to become workable.” Essentially, being processed means “somehow people’s own personal baloney and bullshit has been worked on enough for the last twenty years .... so it’s not necessary to work on the same old earth, that it’s time to raise your gaze and step out beyond your own backyard. So I guess processed means you’ve worked on yourself enough.” Needless to say, the work that remains to be done includes further practice, but with the addition of more emphasis on a mahayana flavour.

To return to the teaching stream, while David was going through all the therapies and during the initial period of his involvement with the sangha, he was still working as a parent paid employee. He described the job as being one where he “was paid to do whatever he wanted .... and because I had a lot of little things I was interested in, and things kids like to do, I was sort of like Uncle Davey.” Given his experience at summer camps, the job was perfect for David, and both the students and the teachers appreciated his presence. As he put it: “Every school should have an Uncle Davey because I made friends with all the kids .... one of the things I did was that I would ask the teachers who was having problems in their class and I would make sure that at recess or lunch I would sit down and eat with those kids or talk to those kids or invite them to my room for lunch.” He would go to a class and take five kids to “do carpentry or take
another five kids to play on the computer, or I’d take another five kids and play some game.” For the teachers, he would take their classes if they were sick as he didn’t have a set schedule, and he would coordinate arts projects and other activities. It was all “fun stuff” and “people loved coming to my room.”

However, eventually a number of factors came together to bring David to the point where he decided to make the switch to special education. One factor was that the job was too easy. David didn’t need to do much in the way of preparation, and there weren’t many aspects of the job that were challenging. He also was starting to become “a legend”, as he put it, and that easily come by celebrity was starting to wear thin. At the same time, the money was starting to run out and David and his wife had a new son, so they were looking for more financial stability than a parent paid employee had. In the end, he applied to another school where rather than a job where he “could just wing it, completely wing it just by being who I was somehow.”, he worked with the most difficult students in the school. David had actually applied to be a regular classroom teacher, but as he had behavioral qualifications, he was asked to take the behavioural class and found that he liked it enough to continue for eight years, up to the time of the interviews when he was in what would turn out to be his last year behavioural teaching.

Teaching behavioural is, to say the least, a challenging job. David is a good teacher, and had been at the job longer than most behavioural teachers, but was pretty much at the end of his tether. Regarding his ability as a behavioural teacher, he told that “I don’t at all think I’m particularly good at it by the way, but compared to other people I’m good at it. That’s the feedback I get .... I’m one of the few programs in the Toronto board that works. Now, I say that tongue in cheek because I don’t think it works at all, but I haven’t quit, the kids like coming, for the most part they’re not suspended on a regular basis, they’re not
sent home for home instruction because that can happen. To give a sense of how demanding the job can be, David told me that at his school last year "There was a grade two opening and there were 400 applications for that job, and the applications were incredible, I mean I couldn’t believe the skills these people had." Meanwhile, "at the school just a few blocks over .... there’s a behavioral opening, a primary behavioural so it’s grade one, two, three behavioural, and there were no applications." Given the lack of jobs available in Toronto at the time, the lack of applicants for the jobs speaks volumes. Furthermore, "People go at an alarming rate. People walk out of classes. You hear about .... some teacher who just didn’t show up Monday morning, called his principal from Vancouver. You hear about classes where there’s no teacher, that they couldn’t find a teacher."

The situation in Toronto had also deteriorated over the eight years David spent as a behavioural teacher. The class sizes have steadily increased from five students in the class to eight, and as David told me "I have six or seven kids in my class who are as bad as the worst kid I had when I started teaching." There were also more alternative programs such as residential programs available if the student was having insurmountable problems in a regular school setting, that are either closed now or have long waiting lists. David also questioned the model that the behavioural programs were based on, and told me that one of the reasons he enjoyed the interviews was that he liked getting down on paper his view that "it’s very sad for them to keep beating their heads against a wall and failing at things that they really have great difficulty with when in reality, if you could send one of them to a woodworker, or a machine maker, or a tool and die maker .... a plumber, I think they’d do fantastic." He believes "they have real strengths these kids, but you know if you put them in front of a book they have difficulty." The difficulties are not all intellectual as he had one student in
the class who was “gifted, a very smart kid.” Many of them come from difficult backgrounds where “there’s a lot of unemployment, poverty, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, prostitution, drugs, alcohol, combinations of these or just a few .... all of them have difficulties at home .... most of them are from single families.” Some of the students had also been re-integrated from residential settings such as the Clarke institute.

When I asked him what kind of education the students received, he told me that he and his assistant “see our role as parenting much more than just academics.” Due to the difficulties many experience at home, many of them “never see a male and a female being nice to each other.” This kind of basic role modeling is an essential aspect of the work that David and his female assistant do. If the kids are behaving well and they’re not terrorizing the school yard, everyone including their parents and the principal consider that to be my job.”

So in regard to the academics, “they are a tool we have and it’s sort of the thread that runs through the day.” The program is also an integrated one where the students take some classes with regular classes and if possible eventual integrate fully into a regular classroom. And regardless of the degree of integration, “when they leave my class they all know how to write, they know how to add and subtract, multiply and divide, and some of them better than others .... some of them are at grade level in one or two areas. Some of them are at grade level in every area. Most of them aren’t just ‘cause we do a quarter as much any other class.” Truancy is also a problem. For example, one student who missed 60 or 70 days that year. The saddest part for David is that he knows that many of his students enjoy his class, as the parents tell him so. However, after finishing the elementary grades, they have to be completely integrated into regular classes, and with the support they experienced in David’s class suddenly gone, many of them end up dropping out, in many cases getting in trouble with the law. In one
three-week period he had five ex-students visit him and every one of them was in trouble with the law. He did tell me of one success story where a student visited him who had become a mover and seemed stable and happy, but he had been about the most stable of all the students he had had.

The above difficulties are further contextualized by a social situation in which, along with the financial pressure from the conservative government cuts to education in general, David felt that "Times are tough in the world economically, psychologically so teachers take a lot of flak because parents don’t know where to address a lot of that pain they feel, so teachers are an easy mark." What David called the "poor morale in teaching these days" is also partly the result of the changes in the roles of teachers. "You weren’t there as a parent, you weren’t supposed to teach puberty, you weren’t there to give them breakfast or lunch or daycare before school, after school. You weren’t there to dress them. All these roles are now taken on by schools .... Kids come poorly clothed for winter, like kids would come without socks or they’ll come without jackets in the winter .... the kid comes hungry and didn’t bring a lunch so you have to scrounge a meal."

The description above is in some ways the tip of the iceberg. As this is not a thesis on the problems in behavioural classes in the Toronto board, I have had to limit the amount of material on conditions in the classroom and other issues that relate to behavioural education. We spent a considerable amount of time discussing the actual classroom situation and events that arose both while I visited the class, and as illustrations of points David made. These will be discussed in the next section of this narrative. For now, I wanted to set the context for what David experienced on a daily basis and give the reader a sense of why David was beginning to feel that his time as a behavioural teacher was coming to an end.
One very important point that I want to make here is that David felt “incredibly fortunate to have found this kind of job, especially when it relates to dharma practice.” Despite all of the difficulties, David found that the position was a wonderful place to apply his Buddhist training, and further his understanding of the practices and the teachings. He feels that he has “been fortunate enough to meet the dharma, to meet my teacher, to practice.” One way of expressing his gratitude for this auspicious situation is that he likes to feel that his “job is doing something that helps, and my style is, I guess is that I need to know, to do that.” Another way of expressing this is that he likes “being out in the front lines, you know, I think that’s one of the reasons I chose behavioural. It’s as front lines as you can get.”

There are benefits to being on the ‘front lines’. The first that David mentioned was “just sort of being on the spot, being forced to be on the spot - working with people that are seriously in need.” ‘Being on the spot’, in our sangha, is a term that means having to relate directly to situations without having the time and space to strategize a response to a situation. In other words, there is a need to be spontaneous and very much in the moment. In such situations, one is able to observe aspects of one’s character that are normally hidden by the carefully constructed and preserved defences of ego. The essential basis for using opportunities to be ‘on the spot’ is to have a daily practice, which we will now discuss.
Formal practice

As mentioned before, David’s main practices are the Buddhist vajrayogini sadhana and Shambhalian werma sadhana. However, his most regular practice is shamatha/vipashyana. As he told me, “I’m not one of those people who loves practice. I like what it does for me, but I think I kick and fight the whole time .... but once my ass is on the cushion, I appreciate it’s there.” He once discussed this with a senior teacher in the sangha. He told me that “we laughed a lot, he said that was great .... those are the best practitioners, the ones who don’t like doing it but do it anyway. That helped me because I thought I was a bad practitioner, but he thought that was fine.”

In general his main concern is about whether his practice is “too hinayana and too insular.” He found that in reading “That’s Funny, You Don’t look Jewish” by Sylvia Boorstien - the colleague of Joseph Goldstien and Jack Kornfield - he resonated with her search to “marry the celebratory quality, the prayer quality, the family quality of Judaism with the wisdom lineage, discipline meditation practice of Buddhism.” David described what Sylvia wrote of her conversations with Jewish rabbis about her Buddhist practice saying: “they often say to her you’re doing too much practice on yourself, your practice should be out on the streets.” For David, this emphasis on a mahayana approach reinforced his previously discussed interest in out-reach and community building.

David splits his practice time about fifty-fifty between the Shambhalian and Buddhist practices. While the Buddhist practice has a “flavour of working with a historical lineage and I really appreciate that the teachings come from somewhere .... there’s a very appreciative, devotional quality to my Buddhist
practice which I like, but I like balancing it with the freshness, everyday approach of the Shambhala teachings." He does the vajrayogini practice occasionally on his own, and attends a group practice called ‘feast practice’ around once a month. He told me that he “hasn’t connected with the [vajrayogini] practice very strongly yet.” A part of the reason for this is that while he was doing his ngondro, he would do most of the practice during summer breaks while on three to five week retreats at Karme Choling. However, he said that “it’s just timing .... I haven’t been able to drag my son there .... but pretty soon he’ll be going to summer camp for a month and I’ll start doing more vajrayogini.” On the other hand, David loves and connects deeply with the Werma sadhana. He told me that “I think if I had time, that would be my main practice because it’s a practice in relaxing as it is. And I don’t know if it’s me or dharma, but somehow Shambhala teachings have a different flavour, they seem to have a flavour of working with the world as it exists now.”

Both the vajrayogini and werma sadhanas take at least a few hours to do, and David finds that “I have less difficulty finding an hour to do shamatha.” He also goes to the Shambhala center once or twice a week to give instruction, and teaches introductory courses on Buddhism. He feels that “it’s important that I spend as much time doing the practice that I’m asking people to do. So even now, if I’m teaching a class, I try for the weeks before the course to do as much shamatha as possible, and during the course, if I have a choice of doing shamatha or my regular practice, I try and do shamatha just because .... I’m better when I’m there because we’re speaking the same language.”

Practices such as raising lungta and some other shorter Shambhalian practices such as stroke practice, David does not do very regularly. As he said: “There’s a number of small practices that one could do on one’s own which I will do occasionally, but generally do only in a weekend program situation .... if I’m
teaching a weekend or assisting a weekend.” He described them as “basically practices to wake-up. They’re short practices to connect with awake energy on the spot.” Another practice David is engaged with is western calligraphy. This post-meditation practice will be discussed later in the analysis chapter.
Practice and Fruition

With all of the above mentioned practices, what are the results and what keeps David coming back 'kicking and screaming to the cushion'? He began answering the question with the traditional metaphor of a drop of water "that is falling for a million years and eventually makes a hole in the rock, you know, it took a long time." The changes have been gradual and "it’s only if I look back - because I still feel confused - I know that I’m not as confused as I used to be, and I know that the kinds of things that used to take up my time and energy were more self-centered."

Much of the contrast, he sees in the kinds of activities and motivations he experiences these days. He is more interested in "how to work with people now than I am in how to work with myself, thought they go hand in hand. I’m obviously interested in .... how to work with myself so I can work with others. I’m sort of much more interested in what’s out there than I am interested in me.” This he contrasted with the ways he used to spend his time. “I used to spend a lot of time escaping .... drinking or watching movies or smoking or eating or entertaining myself. I just have not as much interest in running away from who I am as I used to.” Passing time by watching violent movies is no longer an escape as “it hurts to watch” that, and escape fiction, which he used to read, “for whatever reason, doesn’t entertain me. I find I’m just more interested in what’s actually happening as opposed to some kind of fantasy world, but at the same time I find that what’s actually happening, it’s in your face, it hurts sometimes.”

When I asked him about the nature of the pain he experienced, and if he had resolved some of the sense of being ‘unhappy’ that he had as a child and a young man, he said that “I don’t think happy is the word, but the whole thing
seems somewhat workable .... I feel like I have a fairly good take on what’s happening in my life.” He added that he “wouldn’t say contentment at all, because on the contrary it feels more edgy.” To explain this quality of ‘edginess’, David used a phrase from Shambhala training: the “tender heart of sadness.” This quality he described as feeling “sad, I’d say a kind of sadness with a smile on my face. I appreciate the little things more, but I’m touched by people’s confusion and my own confusion more than I used to be.” In speaking of this sense of ‘being touched’, he said that “once I begin to sort of raise my gaze beyond my own bullshit, then you start to see how much incredible pain and confusion is out there.”

A part of what takes so long in the process of ‘raising your gaze’ is that meditation is a slow process of getting to know yourself. As David said, “What happens over time, when you start to do meditation practice, is you begin to - at the very beginning - become very familiar with yourself. You start to see, oh I’m the kind of person who thinks a lot about their mother, I’m the kind of person who is very aggressive, or the type of person who has a lot of sexual passionate thoughts.” This is not a short part of the process, as although it “happens to everyone if you stick with it, it doesn’t happen over night.” However, having become familiar with your mind, “if you continue practicing, you actually start making friends with your mind .... that’s sort of inherent in the practice because you’re not trying to get rid of your thoughts, you just see that, hey, I have a lot of passion, you see it again, you see it again, you might see it over weeks, months, years of practice, and it starts to loosen its grip on you.” “Maybe the passion disappears, or maybe it doesn’t,” David added, but “you stop being embarrassed about it, you stop seeing it as a bad thing, you start to just accept it as a part of what is happening in your life.”
About the quality of acceptance, David said that “a lot of it comes from sitting practice because the practice is to gently come back to the breath, not to give yourself a hard time, but to accept what comes up without trying to get rid of it.” Rather than “trying to machete it [a thought or emotion], or machine gun it .... every time we see we’re not in the moment we come back to the present moment .... we touch that thought by labeling it ‘thinking’ without trying to get rid of it .... we bite it a little bit, because if you just say ‘thinking’ too quickly you could have the attitude of trying to get rid of that thought. In this case, we just acknowledge that we’re somewhere else and we generally come back to the breath after which point we may go off into another thought.” According to David, this repetitive process of watching the arising, recognizing and labeling ‘thinking’, letting go and returning to the breath, and then eventually going off again and recreating the cycle without condemning yourself about the thoughts that arise is done with “gentleness and a sense of humour”.

Eventually the process is cumulative, and “because you do this a lot on the cushion - you know the point of sitting is not to become a good person on the cushion - there’s a post-meditation experience .... you’re practicing for what’s going to happen off the cushion.” What starts to happen is “if you’ve sat for an hour or two or three, is you start to do the same thing you’re doing on the cushion, you start to notice how you’re dreaming about something else.” From this growing recognition there is a “kind of gentleness toward yourself that starts to grow out of your sitting practice” that is extended to others and as David said: “ I’m definitely more gentle with myself and others, and I definitely connect it with my practice.”
Sangha

Another aspect of extending gentleness to others is the role of the sangha. David told me that he had been “playing with that [his understanding of sangha] lately - what my community is. When David begins to think about community, he said that “I definitely think of the sangha, I mean my fellow practitioners.” There is a practice element in sangha that reflects the significance of sangha as one of the three ‘precious jewels’ discussed in chapter four. David appreciates the diversity in the sangha, and sees it as the main practice dimension of sangha as a whole. I think it is worth quoting David at length on this issue:

I think what I really appreciate about the Sangha is the fact that basically it’s made up of a whole bunch of people, some of whom I’d be friends with, and some of whom I wouldn’t, which is sort of the whole point. That somehow, you know, if we’re going to create any kind of enlightened world, and at some point in your practice you start to see that that’s a possibility, that if I can enlighten myself, that I, if I can at all help other’s enlightenment, maybe there’s a possibility there that our whole world could be less confused. And that whole world is going to include all kinds. It’s not going to just be nice people with good jobs who practice, it’s going to be everyone. People who are having trouble practicing, and murders and thieves and assholes and the whole megillah. And I start to see the Sangha as made up of a whole group of people who one has to work with. Some of whom one likes and some of whom you don’t like and that’s great. So that’s what the Sangha is to me, is a group of people who - oh and at the same time I should say who have somehow plugged in to the same practice I have so there’s you know a real appreciation
there that I’m not just working with people I like and don’t like. I’m working with people who I seem to have some kind of very, very strong karmic connection with, because very few people on this earth have connected with this particular practice, and particularly with this particular teacher and this particular style of practice, so I have a very strong sense of community as the group of people I’m working with.

The Shambhala sangha has some characteristics that are unique among Western Buddhist communities. As David said: “Chogyam Trungpa was a brilliant, realized man who created a particular environment .... a microcosm for what’s going on in the world.” Some of these aspects which David listed include: “a hierarchy, teachers, people to clean the centers, people to provide security, and people to run the legal and financial aspects.” “It was like a small community of people which is very unlike any other group I know of.” This uniqueness is not limited to other spiritual traditions, but also “specifically unlike any other Tibetan group in which most .... have a teacher and a number of students who study with them.” In David’s experience, most other sanghas maintain this structure and the students “don’t step in and take their seat and begin to manifest .... enlightened society in which people are meditating and working with each other.”

He mentioned that he had recently had a conversation with someone from another sangha attending a Shambhala level who had “helped him to realize just how great we’re doing.” The woman had told him that she “appreciated so much what our center was doing .... that people got along at our center .... worked well with each other, that we got so much done, that we had so much vision.” Sometimes from within the sangha, David found that “we feel submerged by it, we feel like it’s too much, it’s too hard and we’re not going anywhere, so it was good to see through someone else’s eyes.” This is
particularly true for David as he is the membership co-ordinator, and lately he had been "just seeing the problems which is kind of sad. I'm seeing things that aren't being done rather than things that are being done." He thought it would be good if we could "create an atmosphere in which we relaxed more with each other .... there's a bit of not celebrating with each other." He also noted that there can be a tendency for people to "join [the sangha] and then somehow buy into a bit of a cushy atmosphere."

For David, one antidote to the "cushiness" is relating to new people at the center. He told me that he likes "connecting with somebody who's never been there before." In his role as teacher, meditation instructor and membership co-ordinator, David gets ample opportunities to meet new people and welcome them to the center. He added that he felt our sangha "had a lot to learn from the Christian community or the Jewish community, that are very welcoming and see that as their practice as opposed to particular individual practice that we do."

Members at the Shambhala center seem to have difficulties with new people as the members "come to the center and they want to do their practice .... they'll walk by somebody they've never met before because they want to do their practice." One reason for this, David thought, was that "most of us still are at that point where we feel kind of fucked up and so we have to do our shama or whatever." He did feel that this "will change over the years" and for now, he saw relating to new people as his one of his main practices.

At the same time, David's "sense of community at this point is bigger than the Shambhala center and the members, and what interests me is the greater community .... I could be in my school, my neighbourhood or the people who come to an open house." At the time of the interviews, David had also been making efforts to reconnect with old friends from before he entered the dharma. The overall tone when he described how and community was that while he
appreciated sangha and felt that he would not be able to maintain his practice on his own without the support of a community, he was contemplating how he could infuse his experience and understanding of community with more of a post-meditation, mahayana inclusiveness.
In the School

It is time now to turn to a more direct examination of how David’s practice and application of Buddhism, affects and in turn is affected by his work at school. David began the second interview in which we focused more on the interpenetration of teaching and dharma, by noting that “because I’ve been practicing for so long, it’s difficult to separate who I am from my practice.” He added that he “was never looking to wear something as some kind of adornment.” To clarify his feelings about the issue, he told me that he felt that to ask what a Buddhist would do, or how he might feel the influence of Buddhism in his life and teaching, would be difficult, as “I don’t sit there as a Buddhist or as a Shambhalian, because that’s who I am. I don’t usually step out of the situation .... to me that would be like saying what am I feeling as a man right now, or as a 46 year old? I don’t do that, I just, I’m just who I am.”

David quoted a Zen teacher who had given the “analogy of walking in the mist and you don’t even know it’s raining and you come back after an hour and you’re soaked.” David also mentioned that some changes he experienced were simply the result of “getting older and not taking as many chances or doing stupid things.” One amusing aside is that he had been speaking with his assistant who had worked with a number of behavioural teachers, and had told her that he had “a friend coming in to see whether Buddhist practitioners yell as loud as other behavioural teachers who don’t practice.” Her response was: “Well tell him that they don’t.”

As the interviews progressed, David did come up with specific points about the interpenetration of his practice and his teaching. However, he said that “I don’t notice the difference so much in teaching - or maybe I just have a bad
memory - as far as the way I related to children and the kinds of difficulties I got myself into. When I look back, I see more through my life outside of teaching as being really different: my relationship with women for example and my relationships with other people.” He later added that he knew he “didn’t have to apologize to me for saying that” as I practice as well and I “wouldn’t try to draw some direct connection.”

**Basic Goodness**

Bearing in mind this reticence to make direct connections, the first thing that David mentioned that seemed to be quite closely related to his practice was that although he was “teaching behavioural where there are these kids who have fairly severe difficulties, that I don’t see them now as having problems.” He said that “this is through my practice and I know this to be true, I actually see people as having basic goodness, some basic sanity, integrity and wisdom, and that they have problems or they have obstacles or they have obscurations, but generally I find I’m teaching toward the sanity.”

The term “basic goodness” is from the Shambhala teachings, and is introduced in the first level of Shambhala training. It is a somewhat difficult idea to understand, and even David admitted in reference to basic goodness, that he “didn’t buy the Shambhala teachings at all, I didn’t understand them, they felt kind of sweet.” Given the significance of both the idea and experience of basic goodness, it is worth quoting David at length on the topic. He described his understanding of basic goodness as being the way...

...that the world touches us in some ways, it might touch us negatively, it might touch us positively, if you see somebody on the street who’s homeless or something, you have a reaction and that reaction
might be to turn away because you know, you can’t stand it. Reaction might be compassionate um .... or it might be just do your little duty, you put a dollar in their little thing and you can get away and pretend that you, you know, you’ve done your little thingy for the day. But either way .... somehow that person did something to you, and my understanding of that is that what it touches is your basic goodness. You know that if you didn’t have some basic integrity or compassion or sense that things could be different than the way they are, nothing would happen, you know, you’d have a sort of ignoring quality. I mean even people who feel things don’t bother them, they’re always depressed or whatever. I mean in some ways that’s their basic goodness, you know, the fact that they’re depressed all the time means that they’re depressed about something, that somehow their lives aren’t measuring up to what they think they could be. So, you know, in my own case I’ve started to recognize now that regardless of how I feel, I find that it, it’s just basic goodness shining through. It could be that I’m feeling good because, I don’t know, the snow fell and I look out the window and there’s some sense of awe quality you know, isn’t that beautiful. Or you know, if I feel shitty because somebody hurt me there’s something in me that was touched. So, I’ve grown to believe now in my own Basic Goodness.

As David has “begun to see it [basic goodness] in myself.” through his meditation and post-meditation, he has been able to “see it in other people.” He told me that he doesn’t “at all feel like kids are you know, little snotty-nose brats in any sense. I feel like you know, they’re just like I am. They’re just; they have their different body, they’re younger.” Another aspect of this is that he has “an enormous amount of respect for them as people.” He drew a parallel with his relationship with his son, saying: “as far as I treat my own child, I expect him to
be a warm, compassionate, dignified person who just hasn’t been around as long as I have, so you know, I might have to teach him how to cook, or throw a baseball, but you know, he’s probably got a lot to teach me too just about, uh, you know, how to enjoy himself for example.”

David contrasted this with other behavioural teachers. He said that “especially with kids with problems - and this is I think the difficulty a lot of teachers get into is they highlight kids’ problems, so if kid’s having trouble with, you know, they’re dyslexic or they have phonics problems or they have you know, math problems - they focus on their sore spots.” David’s approach is related to the earlier discussion of having the students apprentice so that they can experience some success rather than constantly have to confront their difficulties and perceived failures. In contrast to what he experienced as the standard behavioral model, he said “And I almost do the opposite. I find whatever, if they pour coffee well, I’ll have them pour coffee. If they relate well with kindergarten kids. I’ll make sure they volunteer with kindergarten class once a week .... Because school’s hard enough for them with all the social problems they have with the kids and other adults.”

Seeing People

Closely related to David’s experience and application of basic goodness, is that he feels that “when I meet somebody, I just sort of see underneath the bullshit much quicker than I used to.” Another way David expressed this experience or ability to understand people came up in the fourth interview. He told me that “at some point when you practice a lot, you start seeing people for who they are as opposed to what they’re manifesting. So instead of seeing somebody’s trip, you just sort of see what’s motivating the trip, or you just see
what's underneath the trip. And that's sometimes the first thing you see.” He gave the example of “when you see somebody’s arrogance for example, you might see that arrogance, just see how afraid they are .... you’re not intimidated by the arrogance, you know when somebody’s being very arrogant with you, you might see, well that person’s very afraid.” In the case of his students, he said that “If you see them for example being really rude or threatening and fighting back, you just start to see how important every, that they’re hanging onto dear life .... you just start to appreciate how much pain they’re in, so you start to just appreciate their tenderness and their softness and how much difficulty they’re having .... generally my style has been to work with that, to try and just say, you know, it’s OK.”

This source of balance - seeing the sanity or basic goodness in people while also being able to see “through the bullshit” - has been a source of confidence that helps him to follow his intuition and experience, even if it runs counter to the standard models of behavioural education. In reference to after-hours meetings of behavioural teachers in the board, he mentioned that while “every once and a while I’ll go to something that I think is interesting” overall he finds that “they love labels, they love their ADD and their ADHD and their PDD’s .... every once and a while they’ll give you suggestions on how to work with somebody who’s like that that I feel could be helpful, but the negative aspects outweigh the positive.” He added that he “has tried tons of them [suggestions]. They never seemed to work for me. I could never figure out how they could do them.” For David, in the end the labels and suggestions may be helpful in some situations, but “still, there he [the student] is.” The main issue comes down to relating to the student and the student’s individual situation as he “just found that everything that came up in my room never quite fit the category that they had put out before me.”
Genuine Presence

David finds that the best thing he can do is "just try and be me." "I just find in the course of the day, you know, relating to children or adults that there's some quality of this is it, this is who I am, this is what I have to offer. I don't know if it's right or wrong .... I'm gonna step in with what I have to offer .... in my dealings with principal or vice principal, other students, I just present me." To support this goal he said that "the best work I could do outside of school was to practice. That somehow when I practice I feel more connection with who I am and I just see more clearly. And when I see more clearly, I see more clearly who they are." David felt that the connection with practice was quite clear in this case: "That definitely feels Buddhist. Something I've learned .... less afraid of who I am somehow. Or in the Shambhalian sense, not afraid of who you are." In the end, he finds that "it keeps you more honest if you have that energy, so you're not trying to adopt some kind of thingy to come back to. You just come back to you, you know, your relationship with them."

In "coming back" to the relationship with his students, David is able to help them experience some of the emotions they rarely have the ability to touch. While not able to live up to his aspirations in every case, David told me that "If a kid's making fun of me or something, 'cause that happens a lot in my class 'cause you know, the kids will tell you to fuck off or something .... sometimes I just get hurt, which is the most genuine reaction .... you know, when somebody hurts you, you usually feel sad but sometimes you miss it - you get angry." In the case of his students "usually when they do it to other kids in the class they basically get anger, you know, when somebody calls X short, or X calls somebody else fat, generally the other person gets angry back at them and they're screaming and
fighting for two minutes. But usually children don’t, in my class anyway, don’t just say you know, that hurt me.” By being willing to show the students that he is hurt “They see then that what they do to people actually effects other people. And I don’t think they always get it.”

**Flashing Space, Dropping it, and Raising Lungta**

A key ingredient in being able to manifest genuinely and help the students see the consequences of their actions is to sometimes just drop whatever is happening. At one of the interviews, he told me about the day he had had during which “everybody was sort of crazy. By crazy, when I say that I mean there are times in the day when they’re just all doing their little thingy and there’s a lot of energy in the room and it’s difficult to figure out where to step in somehow and cut it.” At times like this, David finds that “there’s just a moment where I sort of, I’m just sort of watching. You know, I don’t feel particularly drawn in .... it feels Buddhist, or it feels contemplative. I feel like I’ve learned something ‘cause I don’t, there’s no knee jerk reaction there.”

These moments can also be created or supported through a practice such as raising lungta or “just flashing something. Sanity or something. Basic goodness, and then I step in.” When I asked him if these moments felt familiar, he said that “maybe it comes out of what’s happening on the cushion you know .... it’s sort of what happens on the cushion. Something comes up, and you watch it, or you know, you taste it, you label it ‘thinking’ and you go back to your breath, so yeah I mean I guess that’s it. You’re just sort of doing the same thing you’re doing on the cushion, you’re just sort of seeing it, seeing something arise and it’s not particularly yours, it’s just something that’s arising. Then you take the next step, whatever that is.”
David told me that a Dharma teacher in the sangha who had been visiting Toronto had said something that had stayed with him, helping him to “just drop it”. He couldn’t remember the exact words she had used, but essentially her point had been that “when things go crazy or you’re going nuts, she said just drop it.” Whatever her words were, he said that “something stuck with me and now a lot of times I find myself in the middle of some thingy with a kid in my room - and they’re great at getting you .... and I flash that a lot in my work - I just go, who cares, you know, who cares if I win this one, just drop it.” While this may sound like a small issue, David maintained that “that’s a case where some particular teaching, I’d say that’s profoundly affected the way I teach. Because I could conceivably get into a yelling fit, argument, all out battle with every kid in the class, every day. That’s not always the best way of dealing with things, but often it is.”

While in the first interview David said that he didn’t raise lungta very often in the classroom setting, he does do it sometimes. In the second interview, he spoke of the practice. His description is interesting, so I will present it in full.

Well there’s sort of a magical quality of what happens with my practice too that, you know, I don’t know if everybody has this, but, many of the practices we do, you actually get a transmission to do, and I’m not sure how that works. But somehow I feel that I have this incredible relationship with Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. And because of that some of the practices that he gave me I can almost just flash them and something happens. I’m not sure why it just happens ‘cause I’m not doing anything. So raising lungta is one of them. Somehow when I raise lungta something happens. I’m not sure what happens, I’m not sure why it happens. When you do it I wouldn’t say it sounds stupid but it’s sort of like why would anything happen when you’re doing that? But it does ....
And there’s different ways you can do it. So I mean one of the ways to do it is just sort of flash it .... you know, be there and wake up, the easiest way to say it in this case. I sort of feel some sense of presence and then, well the one that I’m doing lately - for some reason I just love the practice because you feel some sense of presence and then, and in that case, OK you’re here, you’re not in Jamaica or something, and then some kind of earth quality which you’re, you know, you connect with the earth and everything that means - the kind of nurturing quality of earth and the um, solidity of earth - you can plant in the earth. And then there’s that heaven that I connect with, heaven principle which is aspiration, good head and shoulders, some sense of panoramic awareness and then I connect those two and then I sort of relax in that situation- sort of just feel what that feels like and then radiate. And that can take a minute or it can take thirty seconds or you can do it in sort of 5 seconds or 2 seconds, sort of do the whole thing quickly. I’m not sure why that’s been sort of working for me so well lately.

**Trusting, Relaxing and Entering Their Worlds**

Another way David described his approach to teaching was through a story of an event with one of the more “disturbed” boys in his class. The boy had “spent three years in the Clarke Institute [a psychiatric institute in Toronto].” David described the boy as living “in his own world completely .... he spends his whole life parked in front of video games at home. I mean literally his whole life .... he leaves home just to come to school. He has no sense of Toronto at all or of people.” In the first few weeks of school “all he’d talk about was vampires and
toilets.” The story is quite demonstrative of David’s approach, so I will quote it in full.

I just didn’t know what he was talking about ever. And, I found I kept trying to bring him back to reality but he didn’t come. He liked hanging out there. And then at some point I realized that he wanted me to come into his world somehow. And I remember the moment we connected - it was great. I gave him homework and he goes: “ehhhhhh, what are you gonna do to me if I don’t do my homework?” And I looked at him and it was like I remember there was like a real long pregnant pause and I said: “I’m going to chop off your fingers.” And he said: What if I don’t do ’em the other night?” I said “I’ll chop off your hands.” And I said it like completely straight faced and somehow he knew I was playing and he knew I was being just as serious with my joke as he is, ‘cause he’s, he’ll look you straight in the eye and just tell you the most bizarre stories. And then at some point we connected, we had some great eye contact. I don’t remember what happened there - you know, we either started giggling, or no, no, he kept going I think when he realized that we’re, that we were playing games, he said: “What if I don’t do it the second night?” and I said “I’ll chop off your arm.” I think I showed him my hand like this and said: “My teacher did the same thing to me.” you know, and ever since then, I mean he’s still a very strange character but I think he trusts me more and I will occasionally, some times I’ll say I don’t know what you’re talking about, can you give me a straight answer, or sometimes I’ll just dive into the water with him and hang out in toilet land or wherever it is just to explore it with him. I guess that’s, there’s some sense of trust there you know. I think you, you could, I mean you could sort of see therapists not doing that - constantly trying to bring the person back to
reality. That might be actually a Buddhist therapeutic thing to do, I don’t know, to just sort of trust them where they are and just hang out with them.

To be clear about his approach, David told me that he “would love to change them ‘cause they drive themselves crazy and they drive me crazy and they drive their parents crazy.” The position David takes on how to relate to his students is also pragmatic in that as he said: “to be honest, it doesn’t work the other way.” The approach that he finds works with the students echoes David’s description of his growth from a more hinayana approach to a mahayana one. “I really think the way you get there is to trust them and I think you sort of have to relax with who they are until they can be relaxed enough that they can afford to take some chances - to lift their gaze a little and see beyond their own problem.”

In the past, Looking at the Future

In the fall after the interviews, David transferred to a regular classroom. At the time of the interviews, it was still uncertain exactly what would happen in the fall. The way we discussed his future was interesting from a practice perspective, in that it expresses more about how the practices and teachings influence David. He said that he was still “curious and challenged by having to go in everyday and work with the resources I have to try and make it workable, You know, I think it’s good work - somebody has to work with these kids, and for whatever reason, here I am. Yeah, I’m going to work with my mind and with their minds as best I can until I find it unworkable.” One of the marks of the situation being “workable” was the ability to have a “fresh start”. This experience of ‘fresh start’ - closely related to the experience of raising lungta - David described as “that whole sense of feeling overwhelmed, and then
recognizing, be it by going outside at recess and looking up at the sky, or just sort of acknowledging what’s happening and then just starting over.”

When David finds himself struggling to find a fresh start “it’s a real incentive to me to practice more.” At the time of the interviews, David was finding that “I come home from work, I’m a little burned out and I want to go for a walk, and talk to my wife, or turn on the TV for an hour and then I don’t practice. Lately I’m realizing, yeah I have to start practicing again regularly.” He finds that practice and being able to have a fresh start “go hand in hand and by practicing more I find I do notice that fresh start much quicker ... I can just drop things much more quickly. And you need to do that in my class, ’cause you could hate them, you could see them as the reason, you know, destroying your mind, number one, and also because they’re so mean to each other .... so fresh start is really important.

The problem at the time was that David was finding this more and more difficult. As he told me: “I’m also amazed at how overwhelmed I can be and I hold on to it so strongly, and that I’ve been doing that more lately, so that concerns me.” It was a week later that David and I had the conversation I mentioned in the introduction to the narratives during which the penny dropped and it became clear to David that he would not go back to behavioural in the fall.

Modesty and Confidence

Toward the end of the second interview, David made the point in reference to the issues we were discussing that “this is funny talking about this stuff, you know, it makes me sound like I have something together. You know, for the use of this tape, I want it to be known that I feel 100% on the kindergarten level.” When I asked if he felt he had any insight into life, he
replied: “Only when I see other people. You know, like I go Oh God, how could they miss that?”

In the interviews with David, comparison was one of the ways he spoke of being able to see the difference Buddhism had made in his life. He said that “In school, people seem to be able to put on a professional front sometimes. It’s very effective. And a lot of teachers are excellent teachers. That’s why this is interesting.” The difference was in his colleagues’ lives outside of school. “Outside of school most people’s lives are crazy. And when I talk to them, that’s when I realize, well something’s happened in my life, because you know, it’s not that bad at all. I actually like who I live with - I like my wife. And I find the level of conversation sometimes when people talk about their spouses or about their illness, just what’s going on in their lives, it makes me crazy .... it makes me sad when I realize that a lot of people’s lives are falling apart. So that’s when I realize something’s happening.”

This is a fairly provocative thing to say, and it is up to each individual to consider to what extent they agree with David’s assessment. I will discuss the implications of his comment in the next chapter. For now I will close this narrative with what he returned to immediately after having spoken about what he saw happening in his colleagues’ lives. He said that “the more you start to practice, the more you start to realize you don’t know anything .... somehow you realize your goal is to become enlightened, you know, to save all sentient beings, so all of a sudden that’s when you start feeling you’re on a kindergarten level because the journey is a really long one .... and I’m really at the beginning of that journey.”
Pierre: Mountain Wolf

I first met Pierre when I returned from five years in Asia in 1992. At the time he was one of the administrators at the Shambhala Center in Toronto. He and his wife have put an enormous amount of time and energy into making the center work through both teaching and administration, and still to this day continue to contribute to the community in both areas. They would regularly have new members of the community to their home for dinner, and go out of their way to nurture people’s practice and simply make friends.

Pierre and I became friends over time and have been to a number of meditation programs together in places as far away as Halifax and Colorado. In my experience, these residential programs, where one often lives in tents, sharing outdoor washing facilities, sometimes even practicing in the outdoors, and generally being in each other’s space constantly for days and weeks, helps one become pretty familiar with each other’s particular brilliance and craziness. And Pierre is definitely a unique character. The title of the chapter, Mountain Wolf, is Pierre’s Shambhala name. In my sangha, there are particular points along the path where one is given a name by a senior teacher, either to point out some aspect of the person’s strengths, or some aspect of their character that they should cultivate, or, as in the case of the Shambhala name, simply something about the person that stands out. Mountain Wolf fits Pierre to a ‘T’. He has this quality of being a loner with some pack-animal instincts that keep him from totally drifting away into the mountains, but it is clear that he is quite comfortable doing his thing in his own way. I have always found Pierre to be refreshingly straight forward about both his insights and his confusion -
sometimes irascible and grumpy, but always great company with a big open heart that lets you know where you stand in any situation.
Practice and Teaching History

Pierre has been practicing Buddhism since the early eighties, and much of his teaching career intertwines with his practice history. He told me that his involvement with teaching in one form or another started in his twenties, and that since then he had “always worked with kids.” It was 1972 and the Trudeau years of generous government grants, especially for projects that involved bilingualism, when a friend invited him to head off on a road trip to present puppet shows in French at Francophone communities across Canada. They had a small budget and with that bought a dilapidated old van for $300.00 that friends and family thought wouldn’t make it to Montreal from the Quebec City starting point, let alone make a round trip to the Rockies. At the end of the summer, they had made it back, sold the van for $400.00 and Pierre had discovered a passion for puppetry that was to eventually become one of the things that lead him into education.

In the fall after the puppet road trip, Pierre was back at university in Montreal. That year he got married and started to experience insomnia and emotional turbulence that he attributes to unresolved emotional issues from his teens. As he said: “All my childhood, my teenager’s years - I was 23 at the time - you know all the pain and suffering you go through and just push down, you repress it because it’s too painful. I didn’t work these things out.” His wife eventually told him that something was really wrong as there were days when he would come home sobbing, and he was regularly suffering from insomnia and nightmares. He decided to enter an intensive program of primal scream therapy. After clearing it with the university which lent him the $300.00 for the program, he moved out of his apartment, quit smoking and drinking and spent
one month immersed in the therapy. Pierre said that the program helped him to become “very open and liberated” and helped put him into a stable enough state of mind that he was able to take up a teaching position with his wife in Louisiana where the Cajun governor was hiring Francophones to instruct French across the state.

Sadly, being a couple, they were sent to northern Louisiana to the heart of rural Baptist country where he taught classes of 40 children for 25 minute sessions. It didn’t help that he was 300 miles from the excitement of New Orleans, living in an environment where the people thought the Cajuns were sinners and called them “coon hats”. After the school year was over, he could have stayed and taught at Toulain University, but decided against it when he found out that he was offered the job because hiring local Cajuns would have cost the government more money. So he and his wife returned to Quebec and as Pierre said, “put a cross” on teaching as something he wasn’t interested in.

After returning to Canada, Pierre and his wife split up, but not until after they had a son. In many ways, the boy was to be a grounding influence in Pierre’s life, but before that influence manifested, Pierre left to study puppetry in Czechoslovakia where it is a national obsession with years of tradition. When he returned, he was passionate about using puppetry to teach children, but it was hard to find stable work that paid a decent wage, so he set up a woodworking shop with some friends and rented a huge loft in Quebec City. The work was satisfying and he felt he was relatively successful, but the life style grew more and more dissolute and wild with people he’d never met showing up at the refrigerator in the morning, and sometimes even in his bed. Eventually he had a conversation with his parents where his father told him that his workshop “doesn’t work - you’re dreaming.” and his mother recommended that he “go back West.” Pierre told me that he was “pissed off, but he [his father] was right.”
and so he packed his equipment into the basement of his parents’ house, and on their advice left Quebec again, this time for Vancouver.

The first period in Vancouver was very difficult, and then things got more difficult. He was short of money and trying to make a living through woodworking, carving things and making furniture. Pierre had decided that as his father was a good businessman, and he was reacting against his father in a self-described "hippie style", that all he wanted was some kind of exchange. As he described it, "I do something for you, so you give me something back, it doesn’t have to be money, it can be a meal, you know. In those days, in my twenties, that’s how I figured I’ll live.” Things didn’t work out quite as he had hoped and after a year and a half he was on the beach with no money, no place to live and eating at the Salvation Army.

Around that time, Pierre heard about the French immersion program which had been running in British Columbia for about six years. After hitting rock bottom, he decided to try the puppetry again, this time in the school system. He visited schools proposing to go into grade six classes, put together a show with the students in French and then have them perform it. The schools were interested and for ten weeks at thirty dollars a student, Pierre was back in the realm of education.

The money was enough to stabilize his life and provide room and board, but not much more than that. For not very much money he would lug huge refrigerator boxes, papier-mache materials and everything else needed for the shows, around the city on public transport. Fortunately, while working at the schools, he heard about a FSL (French as a Second Language) teaching program at the University of British Columbia and decided to apply. In the fall of 1983 he got in and a year later graduated as a FSL teacher.
The movement from penniless and wandering the streets to teacher of FSL has another element. Pierre had reached the “end of his road” in Vancouver during that first difficult year and a half. He had returned to the depression and despair that he’d suffered through while in Montreal at university, “walking the street .... wandering and totally lost, not having any goal .... totally desperate.” However, there was a difference. As he told me: “The difference though, ten years later, I saw, I thought, I said to myself, I’ve been here, I’ve done this before. The same thing .... But at the same time, there was some hope I guess. Because I could say OK I’ve been here, I won’t do the same thing, now what.”

For an answer to the ‘now what’ question, Pierre turned to an old friend – Stephan – that he had known when he was living in Quebec city doing the woodworking. Stephan had been practicing Buddhism and had lent him a book by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche called Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. When Pierre had first read the book, he had said: “This is great, but I’m not ready for this, I’m busy, I have my woodworking shop.” But now, down and out in Vancouver, Pierre was ready. So he called Stephan and got the number of the local center, in those days called the Dharmadhatu.

At the center he met the local director, and made an immediate connection. In retrospect, Pierre recalls that he was talking and talking and talking and probably acting pretty strangely, yet no one said he was crazy, they just gave him “lots of space.” The relief was palpable as Pierre unburdened himself, telling his story to the director. After the first night which included meditation instruction, Pierre would visit the center sporadically, usually “when he was in pain”, but his meditation discipline - the ability to just sit on the cushion for the sitting period, usually around one hour - was pretty low. He was, as he told me: “jumping up and down all the time .... ‘cause I was in pain, that was my pain that I couldn’t stay still. And I was, I was in pain so I was trying to avoid it.”
Eventually he was given a meditation instructor by the name of Paul Warwick who helped Pierre to develop the sitting discipline that marks his practice to this day. Paul was "the sort of guy who said .... OK Pierre, this is the cushion, you don’t move, this is it.” And so Pierre started sitting regularly, about ten minutes a day to start and gradually he began to feel better. It is interesting to note that “feeling better” isn’t quite synonymous with feeling good or with pleasure. As he put it: “It’s not that I was feeling better, but that I could see some sanity, I could see I was getting calmer, I was not as agitated psychologically and physically .... and I knew right away, this is for me, this is what I need.”

For Pierre, the meditation practice was connected with the therapy he had undergone while a student at McGill, while it also took the process further. It was a "continuity of what I had done when I was twenty, except with meditation I find it sort of keeps me clean .... You don’t accumulate garbage as much if you sit regularly ....’cause you look at your mind all the time. You can’t ignore it after a while .... I can’t fool myself, maybe I do, I probably do at some level. But it’s more indulgence than anything else.” We’ll come back to this point of indulgence and the connected issue of discipline later. The main point is that for Pierre, going to teacher’s college and entering the dharma happened at around the same time as he emerged from a painful period of his life, and his future career choices were all influenced by this commitment to his Buddhist practice. He always thought it was “interesting .... probably karma .... so anyway I’ll always be grateful just for that .... because I think meditation brought me, settled me down. Not settled down and teaching, settled down and emotionally maturing, growing up in terms of maturing.”

After graduation, Pierre encountered a new obstacle. Everyone from his class got jobs, other than him. He couldn’t understand how his classmates, some of whom spoke fairly limited French, would get jobs while a native speaker from
Quebec with a degree in French literature was finding it impossible to find work. The pain was exacerbated by the situation of his son. An influence in his decision to go back to school after having "X'd" the profession of teaching due to his Louisiana experience was that he wanted to be a positive influence and presence in his son's life. His ex-wife had a job in Quebec City and all the stability that went along with that. Furthermore, her partner at the time was fulfilling the role of male guardian and role model for the boy. Pierre appreciated this, but still "wanted to connect with my son, I wanted to raise him, and he was seven, so I could see it was not good. You know, what was going at home, he was, he needed a man. He needed a male around, and I wanted to be, I didn't want it to be Susan's boy friend, because you know, 'cause I was his father, as simple as that." He knew that it wouldn't be possible if he didn't find some way to stabilize his life, and having graduated, he wanted to take his son on a camping trip for the summer to reconnect before he started teaching. As the weeks went by, Pierre became more despondent and eventually visited one of his supervisors from the program for advice.

The advice was straight forward. "tomorrow morning, he says, go to a second hand store, buy yourself a jacket, tie, pair of shoes, shave, comb your hair." Apparently Pierre's outward appearance hadn't changed much from his hippie days and he didn't own a suit and tie, nor had he ever combed his hair. While one evaluator during his placements had commented on his appearance, Pierre had put it down to a difference of personalities, rather than something that was particularly significant.

By this time, most of the schools had hired their quotas and the only interview that seemed promising was in Mission, a district of Vancouver. At the same time, a job offer came from Fort McMurray with a good salary that reflected the isolation, and with assurances that his passion for puppetry would
be given free reign. Pierre was torn between his commitment to Mission and the eventual offer that came in from the school in Fort McMurray. Having only been involved in the sangha for a short period, he didn’t want to leave his new friends and mentors to go where he was pretty sure there would be no sangha. Paul was very helpful here. His advice was to go, but to write and visit from time to time. Pierre was still nervous about being able to continue his practice on his own, but Paul advised him to “try to do it at home.”

And so Pierre took the Greyhound to Fort McMurray where he lived for two years, the final one with his son. Speaking about his experience there, Pierre said that “I met, you know, right away I met friends, I met people, people were really nice, really, I really never regretted to go there.” They let him develop his puppet based FSL work, and the students loved it, putting on shows in other schools and even in shopping malls. At the same time, Pierre was practicing regularly and read books by Trungpa Rinpoche as well as other Buddhist teachers such as Suzuki Roshi’s Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind, and found that although he was able to practice, he missed the sangha. As he said: “I remember I had lots of longing, I wanted to connect with Rinpoche ‘cause I had the books, I was, I was all by myself. And you know, I was, I wanted to connect with the sangha, but you know, people doing, I was the only one there, I couldn’t hardly talk about it. I could have, but I was very at beginner level.”

After two years in Fort McMurray, Pierre moved to Toronto and took a job in a new French Immersion program at a school in the north of Toronto where he has continued to work since. It was 1986 and in those days according to Pierre “In those days, in ’86, you could pick mostly where you wanted to go in Canada if you were a French immersion teacher.” His decision to teach in Toronto was partly based on the proximity to Quebec where his family lived, and also because Toronto had a Shambhala Center. Ironically, when he got to
Toronto, he found that the Shambhala community was in a transition period without a center, but still there were sangha in Toronto and in a few years they had rented a location and Pierre was involved in setting the place up for practice: building the shrines and designing the layout. He also met his wife Madeline, and eventually became involved in administering the center which he has continued to do to the present day.

Pierre spent a year teaching grade three after which he took over the library which hadn’t made the transition to French immersion. With his background in literature, Pierre was perfect for the job of librarian-teacher. He was also ready for a change after three years of classroom teaching. As he said: “I thought it was a great challenge and I was, after three years you know, being stuck in a classroom, I wanted to do something else, because in the library the thing is you work with teachers, you don’t work only with kids.” He has continued to work as the librarian, developing reading programs and sometimes co-teaching units; sometimes developing units, teaching them and doing the final evaluations.

Overall Pierre has been happy with his career and has found the professional and spiritual aspects of his life in Toronto rich and fulfilling. However, into every life a little rain must fall. The rain in Pierre’s case came two years before the interviews in the form of a new principal with whom he and the other teachers in the school had difficulties getting along. After ten years of teaching and being a librarian, Pierre encountered a situation which almost lead him to quit teaching.

It would not be that helpful to try to evaluate the situation to decide who was to blame and to try to create a black and white opinion of good and bad. but it was apparent to me that there was a general malaise at the school during her tenure there and that her departure mid-way through the school year indicated
that the superintendent shared the feelings. Teacher meetings had sunk to “bitching sessions” and Pierre described himself as “functioning maybe half, fifty, not even fifty percent of what I can do in terms of putting out work and you know, helping.” The worst part for Pierre, as he put it, was that “you question, I question all that during the three years. I thought, you know, I’m blaming the other, you know, all this thing and it’s me and sure it was .... So that’s very depressing because you’re never sure, I was never sure. Well, I sort of knew she was screwed up, but I was looking a lot at myself. It was a lot of pain and I was paranoid.”

The low point arrived when he was evaluated and given a ‘good’ ranking. Up to that point he had had only ‘very goods’, and in the system of teacher evaluations, a ‘good’ was considered to be a negative evaluation. He wrote a response to what he perceived as a lack of professionalism in the evaluation procedure, and after the principal’s departure found that the letter had not been entered into his file. Pierre’s commitment to the profession he loved had waned as the school became more and more troubled. An example of the difficulties comes from a survey of problems at the school conducted by the new principal: even “The students said it was too noisy. I’m talking about kids from grade one to grade eight. It was too noisy - they couldn’t concentrate.”

With the arrival of the new principal during the spring when we held our interviews, things changed. Pierre was pleasantly surprised to find that books were being returned to the shelves in the library and the William Tell overture was no longer being played in the morning across the PA system to hurry the students to class. Pierre described the difference to me, saying: “And it was amazing, like I’ve noticed the last two weeks, like I was so sick of it, like the kids were getting so disrespectful of the whole thing. I had to pick up books, they were hiding books on the floor. They wouldn’t pick up after themselves. It was
like a mess everyday. I had to pick them up. For the last two weeks since she’s gone, I couldn’t believe it, the books are picked up. I always work on that, but it’s like wow, just, the whole energy changed. On the other hand it’s a lot of energy and I get here very tired, but it’s positive, it’s good, you know, it’s like I taught for the last three years, I said I have to quit teaching, I mean I can’t do this anymore, I was depressed all the time. And now it’s like yes, I want to do this you know."

He described the new principal as being “a peace maker” who worked with all of the disaffected elements in the school, listening to their concerns and infusing the school with a new sense of community and generally a sense of freshness. Significantly for this thesis, in the interviews Pierre added that he thought of her as being very spiritual; not that he was aware of any particular religious or spiritual tradition she was a part of, but that she manifested characteristics that in his mind were spiritual. He put it succinctly at one point saying: “I know she has some spiritual, she’s very spiritual in the sense that she has a lot of spirit. You know, she’s a very decent human being."

Pierre said that she brought new inspiration to the school. One significant step the new principal took was to interview all of the stakeholders in the school community. “This principal, she went through each teacher. She wanted to know, have a sense of the staff, she met with the staff, one by one, tell me, she asked questions like: what’s the strength of this school? Uh, what kind of kids you have you know, how decision are made, she wanted to have a picture. And she met with the parents, the kids and the staff, and the kids.”

For Pierre, this initial feeling of “fresh air” was bolstered through what Pierre described as the “vision” she brought to the school. Pierre appreciated the apparent commitment and integrity with which she expressed her desire to help the students develop their values. For Pierre, her work resonated with the
Shambhala teachings in particular. He told me that “in our school philosophy is, you know, honesty, compassion, respect, those kind of values, that’s what we’re trying to promote at our school. So if we’re all working toward the same, that’s what we have in common. And here, in our Sangha, well, it’s creating enlightened society, isn’t it?”

Pierre also described the principal as being “mindful and tender with lots of softness, very Vajra, very precise.” When he mentioned this in the interview, it was said in a tone that indicated to me that he had contemplated these qualities in her - in other words that it was not just a description he had tossed out in the moment.

The next logical question then, is why does Pierre practice, or in what ways does his practice help him to develop these spiritual characteristics and ways of being? There were three main categories of responses to this question that arose in the interviews. The first that will be discussed is related to the above discussion of terms, the second could be described as the fruition or results of practice and the third as the application or use of specific practices in the moment.
Pierre's application of Buddhist and Shambhalian terms were not restricted to describing people. Throughout the interviews, he spoke of situations with his peers as well as with students wherein he was able to work with the detailed understanding of the ways in which people relate to themselves and their environment that is expressed in the terms, and use them to guide his actions in ways that were more skillful in bringing out the best in situations. The point here is that having a lexicon such as that developed through the combination of practice and study helps a practitioner to identify the specific details of a situation, to understand the dynamics, and from this to come up with ways to work with the situation. In Buddhism this is described as combining prajna and upaya, or wisdom and skillful means. Wisdom here represents the ability to understand the relative and ultimate aspects of the situation - the storied realities as well as the possibilities for how to work with the reified dysfunctional aspects of these stories through understanding the ultimately constructed nature of the storylines. Skillful means is about the ability to work with the insights in tangible, practical ways.
Fruition and Application

One example Pierre gave of the tangible, practical ways in which he worked with his daily experience was of an experience early in the school year while reading to a class of grade twos in the library. He described it as “a perfect situation to, to see the practice, actually to do the practice right on the spot.”

The practices he was speaking of was “Mindfulness practice or tonglen. But mostly mindfulness.” He described the process as “just seeing what comes up while you’re reading and the kids, they always, there’s always something going on, right? The way, and you can look at what’s going on in your mind. Even though you’re right into the story you’re telling, things come up. In terms of irritations, or joy sometimes.” An interesting point is that a part of the practice is to use difficult emotions to wake up. As Pierre said: “And what I noticed is what would wake me up to bring me back to the present, it was often irritation that would come. Like a kid would do something, or sometimes it was coming from nowhere, I was just getting pissed off. Very subtly, it was not like I was aaarrrr, I was getting grumpy and all that. And then I would just get a little irritated. But then the more you work, the more it comes up you know. You just stop …. stop being irritated. Or, or not that; you stop going along with it, with that story line of being irritated, whatever irritated you.”

There was an interesting point that Pierre made. He said: “you stop the, the story line, but the emotions stays there …. I was not getting rid of emotion I think, but the story line. You know, this kid is a jerk ‘cause you know, he’s not listening or she’s not listening or she you know, she make faces or they just don’t listen. At first your first reaction is, they don’t listen, they’re bad, you know, but once you look at that, you realize it’s probably because I’m not that

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good in telling the story. You know, you look, you start looking that way. So, but to do that I think, where meditation is helpful is that you slow down enough that you can let these things arise.” The spaciousness that allows mental phenomena to arise, Pierre called “maitri.” which is translated as loving kindness and sometimes friendliness to your self. As he said: “It’s basically developing maitri or friendliness towards yourself, so that these things arise. And then that wakes you up when they arise.”

Pierre described his experience of the larger process from the meditation cushion to application in the classroom in the following passage:

Yeah, well, the mindfulness becomes awareness. That’s vipashyana ....Well you see on the cushion you do shamatha practice which is mindfulness. That doesn’t mean you don’t have vipashyana when you practice on your cushion, but basically that’s what the emphasis is, I think, the mindfulness. So you, you do that on yourself. There’s nobody around to irritate you but irritation is still coming. But then after lots of meditation, I think, you go out, for example teaching; and I think teaching is a very good situation for that. Then you realize that the same thing happens. But I don’t know if that makes sense. But the thing is, by developing some space, some awareness, some maitri, you allow on your cushion these things to arise .... You let them arise. So eventually you do the same thing with others. And in a teaching situation, because you always with people, whether it’s kids or other teachers or your principal, you do the same thing. So you allow them to irritate you in some ways. You don’t snap back because the kids are not listening or it’s making a joke or whatever he or she does. So, in terms of others, in terms of relating with others, that’s very helpful. Because that allows them space to do whatever they do.
Of course the process is not a guarantee. As Pierre said: “Sometimes I will still snap. Well snap is a hard word, it’s not the right word, I will still you know, be quite, shut it up. But, I think the view is, is to respond but in a way that the kid doesn’t have anything to grab on. If you get irritated the kid knows that. Then it’s even worse in most cases.”
Practice

Daily Practice

Pierre's main practice is vajrayogini, one of the sadhanas mentioned in chapter three. He also does regular shamatha practice and another sadhana called guru yoga. Along with his practice, Pierre studies regularly, and at the time of the interviews he was studying for a ngondro instructor's program. In his estimation, he practices "around an hour a day on average. Sometimes I won't practice for two days, but on weekends practice more", with longer sessions of up to three hours on weekends.

One way he spoke of the effect of his daily practice was through how he felt when he missed practicing for a period of time. He spoke of getting angry, not that he doesn't get angry sometimes when he practices regularly, but he "holds on to it longer" and his "emotional attachment to it lasts longer." He felt that the contrast was very obvious. He gave the example of a man who had stayed with him and his wife for a week. "When I don't practice, like, as an example when Alex was here .... I didn't practice for what, six days in a row .... you know, I really liked the guy, so we talk and it's very nice - I'm not putting that down. But inside myself I can feel this (makes a scrunching noise) it starts to, you know, there's a knot coming, you know, and I'm not as, right away I know I'm not as, you know, I don't feel as good. I don't feel as healthy, I don't sleep as well, I smoke more. You know, I get much more neurotic and I get nasty, very grumpy." He also spoke of "being in shape", a way in which practice helps him to cut down on his "speediness" so that "you can have that space where things can come up without being put off by them." It also meant he was able to "be
open to whatever happens within the lesson I’m teaching, within whatever activity I’m doing with the kids.”

These descriptions all revolved around the issue of communication for Pierre. Being willing to be “hurt” or “wounded”, was the result of an approach to communication and openness wherein “you allow anything that comes up to come up without pushing it down.” This is for Pierre the “ground for communication.” This ground of communication is predicated on finding and dissolving any “boundaries” or sense of “territorality” that he experienced when relating to the school environment. He drew a distinction between practicing for the experience during meditation and what he thought was the actual goal of meditation practice when he said: “I’m not practicing so that I have the experience. I’m practicing to be open. To open up to the others, you know, my fellow sentient beings. You know, you know, that’s the idea without putting any, you know, putting any boundaries. You know, the whole territory thing that’s, you don’t hold on to your things.”

Retreats

Pierre tries to go on retreat for a week or two every year. While on retreat, he does his main practice, a sadhana involving visualization and mantra, which also incorporates sessions of shamatha/vipashyana and tonglen. Retreats are an intensified experience of relating to one’s mind, and Pierre finds that having those opportunities are invaluable for developing a strong relationship with his practice. One of the things that he appreciates is the opportunity to focus on practice without any distractions. As he said: “I like the intensity .... the energy .... the energy of being stuck in a cabin. It’s intense. Everything,
everything to me, everything is intense. So your experience, everything is heightened."

This is not to say that retreat is purely a pleasurable experience. Pierre told me that during the period before a retreat, he would feel a range of emotions. "You know, and it's not, I don't go there for pleasure. Every time I go, there's always an edge before I go oh shit, I'm going to Karme Choling. Get your stuff ready, you say oh shit I'm going to Karme Choling. You know, it starts already. From the day I booked a cabin, five months before, I start thinking about it. It's like, shit, what am I doing, you know, oh shit you've, it's retreat you know. It's not pleasure, there's always an edge, it creates an edge. And it's, I find that very interesting to work with." A part of the "edge" is the direct experience with his confusion and neuroses which are unavoidable in such an environment. As he said: "Your neurosis, you get really neurotic, you know. I get totally crazy for a day. I feel that way anyway. When I am doing it .... And then, then you settle down, OK, but it's like every year I have that experience. The first day or two, in terms of our practice, it's very, all kinds of stuff comes up when you're stuck in a cabin. At Karme Choling there's nothing to do except practice and you have, you have first resistance, the practice and then there's nothing else to do .... And it, it's good because you can't avoid it, that's what I need I think, that intensity so I can see it, because I'm probably blind. But it makes, it makes it so clear that you can't fool yourself. This is, this is who I am, this is what I am you know." Despite the rigours of retreat practice, Pierre made it clear that he found it extremely beneficial for his connection to the practice, and that he would miss it if he did not go. "Vajrayogini is definitely a retreat practice. You need that. I need that anyway, to have a connection with the practice to know what you're doing .... no, I wouldn't go without a retreat every year. Like this year I'm not sure if I'll do one, but, like after five years doing that, if I don't, I'll miss it .... yeah it's a
good thing to do I think. We’re always, we’re always encouraged to do retreats as much as we can.”

Another part of the appeal of going on retreat is the difference in his life after returning from retreat. He told me that “When I come back from retreat I can do so much without being tired. ... And you realize, you realize after a week, wow, you know, I did so much and didn’t get tired .... And I sleep well .... And to me it’s because there’s some synchronization probably that I have.” Pierre further described the “synchronization” saying: “I think it’s because you’re synchronizing body, speech and mind .... There’s no doubt kind of thing. You just do it. There’s no gap between, no discrepancy between the three.” These three elements are a traditional way of describing the three modes of manifestation of sentience, the body being the physical manifestation, speech being communication in general and mind being mental activity. When body speech and mind are synchronized, Pierre told me that “the energy sort of flows. There’s no obscuration as much. And I’m not saying that in a conceptual way. I’m saying that from experience I think. That’s the theory. ‘Cause I experience the energy of doing all kinds of things. Not necessarily building stuff, but just being well .... And everything seems to flow naturally.”

These heightened experiences tend to last for a few weeks. However there is a cumulative build-up which includes the growth of confidence in the power of the practices and in his ability to progress along the path. Simple things such as “being able to relate with people without being too grumpy” act as a touch stone or reference point throughout the year, reminding Pierre when he finds himself wanting to snap at students or getting grumpy with people, that there is another way to be. In the end, Pierre repeated what he said about practice in general: “It’s healthy, it’s very healthy.”
Pierre spoke of two practices that he did with some regularity in teaching environments. One of these - tonglen - is a traditional Buddhist practice that was mentioned in chapter three, and the other - raising lungta, also called windhorse - was from the Shambhala lineage of practices. Pierre has a stronger connection with tonglen, so that will be the first one we look at.

**tonglen**

Pierre spoke of tonglen as happening in "a flash", of it being an experience of "extending out .... in a split second." This flash consisted of recognizing someone’s pain and as he said: "owning it." “You take it as your own, then you feel it and then, you know, expanding out the opposite, or you know, joy.” The central aspect of the practice is to recognize the ego-based pain and suffering that gave rise to acts of aggression and such, and being willing to be open to the experience to the extent that one is willing to draw in both one’s own pain in the moment as well as the other’s pain into oneself. This
is followed by sending out whatever joy, compassion and gentleness possible. For Pierre, the practice is “a way of communicating.”

Of course the reality is that sometimes one has that flash and yet still is unable to let go of the anger or hurt, but that is why it is called a practice; one has to view the fruition as a long term path and bring to the cyclic nature of the path the same gentleness and compassion spoken of earlier in the context of practice regularity. In all of these situations, there is a cumulative relationship between the gentleness one brings to bear on oneself and that which one is able to extend to others.

Windhorse

In the interviews, we didn’t discuss the windhorse practice very much. He does the practice occasionally, perhaps once a week or so. He told me that he was “starting to get into the, to do this, just before I have a class, I know it would be good to raise lungta, you know, that’s, that’s why we’re having this practice.” The most interesting thing about the practice in Pierre’s case, is the way he felt about it. He said: “Well I wish I could do it more, but at the same time I look at it as, well I’m being more, getting more aware of it and eventually I’ll do it.” The lack of guilt over not doing the practice as much as he could will become more significant when we look at the narratives of the newer participants.
Teaching and Practice

Throughout the interviews, Pierre spoke of how he felt that the profession of teaching is a great environment for a practitioner. He had felt this since the time when he first began to practice and to teach. As he said: “When I started practicing, I thought that would be the best job to practice. Not for the holidays, but in terms of practicing working with people.” Of course the holidays are very convenient in that there are ample opportunities for retreats and other programs. Pierre has twice gone to a practice center called Dechen Choling in Limoges in France to help run programs there, and as discussed earlier, he has done a retreat every year for the past five years.

Pierre was very clear that in his opinion, teaching was a great job for developing “Mindfulness, awareness and compassion.” In all of the examples given above, he stressed these qualities as being essential to his ability to work sensitively with the students. His ability to use practices such as tonglen and raising lungta were described as ways of further promoting his ability to manifest those qualities and apply them to his professional practice. As he said: “It’s a perfect job for that I think. Whatever level. To apply the teachings, you’re right in it.” At one point, he described teaching as a “perfect lab” for applying the Shambhala teachings on promoting enlightened society.

For Pierre, there were some very specific characteristics that he felt were necessary for teaching, and which he felt his meditation practice helped him to develop. These were not listed in any particular hierarchy of significance, so I will present them in the order we discussed them.

He first spoke of the need for patience. In all of his teaching, Pierre found that the need for patience was a thread that ran through his daily experience.
Whether it was working with fellow teachers or with students, Pierre felt that for him the need for patience, which is closely linked with spaciousness as discussed earlier, was central to being an effective educator. Another characteristic was clarity which was closely linked with communication skills, discipline and gentleness. In his observations of both his own teaching and that of other teachers, one of the marks of a good teacher was having a clear sense of the curriculum goals in both a long term and a daily basis. As he said: “very specifically, if you teach a bunch of kids, you have to give them clear expectations in what they gotta do. “

After having firmly established these goals for himself, the next step was to clearly communicate them to the students, along with the reasons for the goals. In this process, Pierre felt that there were two characteristics that needed to be balanced - “gentleness, at the same time being very firm.” The proper balance of gentleness and firmness made for what Pierre called “good discipline.” Discipline involves the daily maintenance of procedures and guidelines established for things such as the etiquette for working in the library, putting away books that have been used, and noise levels, as well as guidelines for how he ran his classes.

Pierre described the natural process of testing the boundaries that children engage in: “And kids play with that for a couple of months. And then after that, it’s fine. But if you don’t do that, you struggle with this the whole year. You never, you know, kids will always, because they don’t know. You don’t know what’s, what’s the boundary. So they always try. That’s what kids do, they always, you know, they will test you all the time. But if you make it clear, they’ll do it, they’ll do it.” For Pierre, September is largely given to establishing “the ground, the perimeters .... the discipline. This is what I do, this is how I am.” For the first month or two of every year, the students naturally push the boundaries
before settling down to routines, after which the classes and library run smoothly. He saw this as a natural process that children went through, and as such his response of clear guidelines is a response that gives the students a means to settle down and put their energy into their work as opposed to constantly finding ways to provoke and challenge the systems.
The interviews with Pierre were significant in the stress on practices. For Pierre, his teaching career began in earnest at the same time that he began to practice. This combination makes it difficult to separate the effects of the practice with the effects of teaching as a practice, a comment that came up in all of the interviews. A further issue with Pierre was that at the time of the interviews, he was coming out of the difficult period with the principal, and just beginning to reconnect with his love of teaching under the new principal.

During the difficult period, he had tried not to solidify blame on the principal, and in as much as he succeeded in that, he was also beset with doubts and questions about his calling to be a teacher. Now, some two years later, after reading this section, Pierre commented to me during a conversation after having read the narrative, that he felt it accurately represented his feelings about teaching, and furthermore was accurate in the emphasis on practice, in that practice is the most important thing in his life. With the difficult times teachers are experiencing under the conservative government in Ontario, Pierre is not as excited about teaching as he has been in the past, but he still appreciates the opportunity to put the teachings and the practices into practical daily application in his classroom and library work.

The final point I would like to make here is that the practices such as raising lungta and tonglen are dependent on ones' daily practice, whatever that may be. In isolation, they eventually become lost or forgotten in the speed and pressure of teaching. With daily practice, one's experience of the power of the practices is deepened and kept fresh in one's memory. There is a similarity with the primal scream therapy Pierre went through. After the program, he felt
refreshed and cleansed. However, after a period of time as there was no daily practice to maintain the connection, the effect wore off and eventually the same issues returned.

With daily meditation practice - and I would suggest with any spiritual practice - the epiphanies experienced either serendipitously or in heightened situations such as retreats do not fade in the same way. While the intensity of the retreat experience diminishes, the central aspect of being aware of one’s mind, one’s motivations and the possibilities for working with difficult situations is maintained and in many ways honed through application. As Pierre recognized, the more often one realizes mistakes and lost opportunities, the more likely it is that one will be able to take advantage of such situations in the future. In fact, practically speaking, this process of trial and error and waking up to one’s confusion is absolutely necessary to the path as mistakes do happen and we do forget sometimes to bring compassion and awareness to every moment of our lives. Developing a relationship with this aspect of the path, a relationship where one has compassion and a sense of humour about one’s own foibles, is extremely helpful in facilitating the very process we have been discussing.
Ron: Searching

Of the four participants, I knew Ron the least. I had heard of Ron for a number of years from his ex-wife who was a good friend of mine in the sangha, but it was not until about a year before we held the interviews that I met him. He had been practicing for around three years, had become more involved over the year leading up to the interviews, and had taken a number of Shambhala levels. When I asked him if he would be willing to participate in my research, he was very willing. We had three interviews and an observation over the period of the research.

Perhaps it was because I knew the others more intimately that the interviews with Ron focused less on his background and history, and more on his present circumstances. It was not that Ron was reticent about details, but the interviews, while touching on his background, seemed naturally to flow more toward discussions of his classroom and his spirituality in general. This may also reflect his feelings at the time about membership in the community and overall commitment to the sangha and to practice. However, we shall discuss these issues later in the narrative.
Ron traces his interest in spirituality to reading Dostoyevsky as a teenager. He told me that “a lot of my spiritual development and exploration began with Crime and Punishment and reading Dostoyevsky, and the idea of suffering, that by recognizing your suffering, by identifying the suffering, it has redeeming qualities.” One of the things which drew Ron to Buddhism was the stress on compassion, as “for the last twenty or fifteen years anyway, compassion has been a central theme in my life.” He tied the themes of suffering and compassion together, saying: “suffering has redeeming qualities and I think compassion plays a very important part. Helping people recognize that okay, you will suffer, and that that is suffering, but don’t let it have a negative impact - see if you can make it have a positive impact on your life.”

Ron maintained his early interest in Dostoyevsky and the exploration of suffering and compassion, re-reading Crime and Punishment at least ten times, and “each time finding something new.” The interest eventually took him to graduate school at the University of Toronto in Russian studies. He had planned on staying at university and doing his Masters and Ph.D., but changed his mind, and in 1987 entered teachers’ college. The change of direction had two influences. The first was that as he said: “I was disillusioned with the program at U. of T.”, and the second was that “I needed the money ‘cause I’d just got married and I had a sort of instant family.” He had felt that “there were lots of other possibilities, my thinking at the time was I wanted something .... that I could start as quickly as possible and I wanted it to be a profession .... I was thinking either teaching or library studies, and what it came down to was library studies was two years and teaching was one year, so I decided to go into teaching.”
decision was also bolstered by the fact that "teaching has always been an option in my mind, I have always been interested in teaching."

Since he started teaching in 1989, Ron has never regretted the decision, and in fact loves his work. He described it as "one of the few jobs where you can go in in the morning feeling quite down, and then have such positive energy in the classroom from the children that you leave at the end of the day feeling quite good about yourself." He sees a part of this effect as arising from his relationships with the students as "You have thirty kids in the classroom and each one of them, there's a certain amount of love and caring in them all towards you, I mean that's a great feeling." The result is that, as Ron told me: "I love my job, I really do and everyday I thank heaven that I could just go in there and feel that, that sense of accomplishment and the sense of caring."

About two years after starting teaching, Ron's marriage ended, but by then he was firmly established as a teacher, and so although one of the original reasons for taking up the career was gone, Ron continued to teach. He also continued to remain friends with his ex-wife. This relationship was what originally brought Ron to the Shambhala Center and to practice. While they were still together, she had begun to explore Buddhism, and over time Ron "saw the positive influence it had on her life .... [and] .... decided that it would be something that would be beneficial." He was impressed at how she began to "sort of accept things and just identify rather than really trying to really analyze things to death." He also noticed that she was "dealing with her anger as well. She deals with it a lot better than she has in the past. She recognizes what is the cause of the anger more than she has in the past."

Ecumenism

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Ron sees his involvement in practice as part of a continuum as he has “always been somebody who’s really enjoyed exploring the spiritual side of things. And this was just one, another step of that exploration.” Over the previous year, Ron had taken a course through continuing education at the University of Toronto in Eastern religions. He also continued to attend a variety of Christian churches, although he doesn’t see himself as a Christian as he doesn’t “believe that Christ was the son of God.” However, this had not stopped him from attending services at a United Church over the three months prior to the interviews. His girlfriend at the time was a Christian, and he told me that “During the Easter weekend we went to four different churches .... we started off at the United Church and then the next day we went to an Anglican church, third day we went to a Roman Catholic church and the fourth day we went to a Presbyterian church.” While these visits were partly under the influence of his Christian girlfriend, he told me that he “wouldn’t go, however, if I didn’t want to.”

The visits interested Ron in a number of ways. He loved “meeting people and watching the ritual and even just comparing the different styles, different rituals that go on and formalities and the differences between the formalities.” He also found “The whole idea of death not an ending but a beginning .... very important.” Another important Christian teaching that Ron connected with was “the whole issue of compassion which is central to Christian faith.” On a practical level, aside from “the beauty of the ritual” Ron found that churches are “a nice place to meditate. Just going there and being able to actually sit in a pew and do shamatha practice.” And as he said: “There are much more churches around than there are Shambhala shrine rooms.” He recognized that he could simply sit at home, but “I don’t get that sense of community at home and I know that if I go
to church on Sunday there is going to be a community sitting there and I can practice meditation there .... there is of course distraction there because of the singing, but you do have times when you can sort of sit there and try to meditate, practice.”

**Community: Appreciation and Difficulties**

Ron and I spent quite a lot of time discussing his relationship with the sangha. He had become a member after he finished the first five levels of Shambhala training because he “felt that in order to go on to another level, that’s what I had to do.” He “also wanted to explore the philosophy further.” However, he still questioned his commitment and felt “sort of like being a member without having the responsibility of being a member. Pay your dues and leave me alone type of thing.” At the same time, Ron recognized the need for membership. He told me that “it’s very important. I think it’s like any other organization, it’s certainly important to have a membership, to have people that are dedicated and willing to help out and give a hand, yeah definitely.”

The feeling that membership was required had only arisen after he had finished the first five levels. He described them as “a nice little overview and they keep it very simple, not practice simple - there are a lot of difficulties involved in it.” During the first five levels, Ron felt that “There isn’t as much emphasis on the membership, becoming involved in helping out in the membership. It’s just you are there, there is membership and you are outside it. You are felt very welcomed but you don’t have any sense that you need to belong.” During the period of the interviews, Ron was having some difficulties with being a member of the community. He told me this was partly because “there seems to be that little jump for me which is always difficult. There seems to be a lot more
commitment needed and I always find it difficult, so I'm struggling with that a bit."

There had also been “several incidences where I felt that I should be walking away from it.” The first incident involved a weekend during which Ron was staffing a program - basically helping to run the program by cleaning, preparing food and other activities - so that the participants can focus on their practice. “I did service or staffing of a level, level 1 on one weekend and I didn’t want to be there. It was one of those weekends it was so beautiful outside and I wanted to be outside and I was starting this relationship and I was thinking I would love to be outside spending time with my new girlfriend. So that was a struggle.”

The second incident occurred on a trip to Karme Choling, the retreat center in Vermont. Ron had been stopped at the border and it was discovered that he had a number of outstanding speeding tickets. He was detained and had to post bail in order to avoid being put in jail. When he finally got down to Karme Choling, there were also reports of a winter storm coming. As Ron said: “So when I got down to Karme Choling, I sat the next morning and I just felt to myself, I actually felt a very strong spiritual crisis and I couldn’t identify what was going on really and I sat for 2-3 hours, not long a time but enough to start wondering about why I was doing this, so, and then I just left.” A part of the problem was that Ron felt that staying was counter productive as he felt that he wasn’t able to apply the practice to his situation. “I thought to myself what’s the use of this practice if it doesn’t help me to deal with something like that. And of course I recognize that that’s not the purpose of the practice and all that but still it’s difficult .... So I should have been able to just touch that and let it go, right? I mean that’s part of the practice. Boy oh boy.” While Ron understood that the
thoughts and feelings don’t just evaporate, he added that: “I should be able to sit with it and identify it, but it just stewed and stewed and stewed.”

The worst part of the situation was that he felt a sense of expectation being placed on him. As he said: “the whole thing was too that on top of that I felt that I had to stay there. And I think that was the worst feeling that I felt. I felt like okay, I’ve made a commitment to the practice and I made a commitment to myself that I would sit this weekend, 3 or 4 days and pursue this, I made a commitment. And then all these things happened and I said to myself I made all these commitments, I’ve got to stay here and do this. And that bugged me more than anything else. And I thought to myself who’s kidding who? That’s bullshit, why do I need to sit here and stew and why is that? So I am just going to go.”

When I asked Ron if this story connected to his feelings about membership in general, he responded: “Yeah it does. I am not so dedicated to the philosophy of the practice that I want to make that commitment. And I want to be able to - and it’s probably a cop-out on my part, I mean perhaps, perhaps not - but I want to be able to go home and sit myself for an hour and not feel as if people have to depend on me or that I am responsible for something.” On top of his desire for independence, Ron also mentioned his other interests as being a factor in his reticence to fully commit to membership. “I enjoy the spiritual aspiration and I am still very much interested in Christianity as well, so that there is very much a pull both ways and I am also interested in exploring Hinduism as well. So it’s a sense that I don’t want to commit myself totally to this.”

Aside from Ron’s difficulty with committing to the community, he appreciates the work they put into hosting programs and generally running the center. In his experience, the “people who are there are wonderful people. I mean and you can see the effect that practice has, although I didn’t know them
before that. But everybody seems to be very caring and, and very hospitable and very open.”

Another observation Ron made about the community was that while he had not “explored this avenue, this is more ignorance on my part than it is anything else.” he felt “that perhaps the membership is too internalized, that a lot of it is to deal with let’s see how we can make Shambhala work and perhaps it’s a little bit too much tunnel vision. They are too busy worrying about the strength of the Shambhala community, and there are things going on outside that, that they could be helping with.” When I asked him to elaborate on the ways the community could extend itself, he mentioned “Becoming involved in food banks and becoming involved in helping the homeless and involved in - whatever.” Finally, he also mentioned a project that his ex-wife was thinking about and that “would indicate to me that Shambhala is more outward looking. She suggests having some sort of meditation centre for street kids.”

Another issue concerning the community was the distinction between Shambhala training and Buddhism. As mentioned earlier, Ron was going through the Shambhala training levels. He had not been involved in the Buddhist side of the community, and made a clear distinction between the two, saying that it “It fascinates me but it’s not something I, there was a time when I thought about it seriously, but when I became more involved in the levels, the membership levels, A, B, I started to question whether I would. I certainly would like to pursue it at an intellectual level but whether I pursue it at spiritual level remains to be seen. The main distinction, Ron sees as a question of “a lot more commitment, for me a spiritual level would be becoming a Buddhist .... Taking the refuge vows and making a very strong commitment to the Buddhist community.”
When I asked him for further clarification of the distinction, he said: “You know it’s sort of like, I will give an analogy here, it’s sort of like living with somebody and getting married. There is a difference, for me there is, there is that commitment, that sense of making a commitment: boom. I’m going to stick with this for the rest of my life. Whereas living with somebody, well not necessarily living with somebody but just being in a relationship doesn’t mean that I am making that commitment for the rest of my life, okay this is fine for now but perhaps five years from now I might explore some other avenue.”

Another issue behind Ron’s hesitation to become further involved in Buddhism and membership in general involved “the idea that I am going to have to eventually believe in some sort of, you know, reincarnation or karma - those things - that’s the step I am not willing to take yet. If I do at all.”

Ron stressed that the main point regarding membership and beginning to engage in Buddhist practices such as tonglen was that “I am also right now very satisfied with just doing the shamatha practice. I feel that brings a lot to my life and I feel that until it’s not satisfying me anymore, then at a practice level, then I don’t think I need to explore anymore, well I don’t want to explore anything else. Priorities again. Not that I don’t want to read about it because I have done reading of course.” This sense that there was much to explore, but that he would do it at his own pace and as it made sense to him, was a theme throughout our discussions. He summed up the source of his curiosity saying: “But the sense that there is a way to treat other people, the way you communicate, the way you understand yourself, that is something I can definitely pursue, to some level.”

Ron also appreciated the secular quality of Shambhala training, and what he perceived as the freedom to continue exploring other traditions that came with the secular approach. He told me that “The reason why I enjoy this particular practice is because there isn’t, although there is a very strong Buddhist
base to it, it is non-denominational. There is no feeling that I have to be accepting the laws or the rules of some specific church or some specific religion. There is certainly amount of freedom involved in it as well. It hasn’t stopped me from going to church. I still go to church and I still explore I am still exploring other avenues as well.”

The final point about membership is that Ron had taken a hiatus from the center during the three months before the interviews. He told me that “before it wasn’t a conscious decision but I think I have I made a conscious decision just to sort of step back and give it some time and then come back to it. I really doubt that I won’t come back to it. I know in my mind that I will come back to it.” At that time, he was “enjoying the fact that I can just sit outside and look in. Sit back and look into my past - the last couple of months and see how intense it had been and how involved I was. I mean in my mind although I wasn’t as strongly involved it was quite a commitment for me. So just sort of look back and look at the commitment and evaluate it and come back to it and go with it.”

While there were many ways which will be discussed in which teaching and practice complimented each other, there were some difficulties as well. Ron told me that “I have found teaching to be sometimes actually a hindrance or interference with my practice in that it is very time consuming. And there are times when I had a level to do which means a whole weekend is written off and I become during the level very frustrated with the fact that I have all this work that’s building up.”

Despite the initial sense of conflict at putting so much time into his meditation training, Ron said that he has “always found that to be ultimately in the end, although I am very frustrated in the moment, in the end I always find it to be very rewarding being able to deal with that. To accept that challenge, sort of deal with that while I am sitting. So in that sense teaching does, I mean there
has been some interference with my practice because of teaching.” Another way that teaching enters his practice is through the kinds of thoughts that arise during sitting. As he put it: “I often find that while I am sitting all sorts of things about teaching comes to my mind: creative thoughts about what I can do in the classroom.”
Effects of Practice

Straight Forward and Hypothetical

The discussion of membership brought up an interesting issue regarding the effect meditation has had on Ron. He told me that "being able to tell you all this [his reservations about membership], is the proof that the practice works because if you asked, had probably asked me these questions four years ago, I would have probably given you bullshit because I was feeling uncomfortable about being in the membership, I wouldn't have, I mean I would have just made up a story." In our conversations, Ron drew connections between his practice and his life that were directly causal, but at the same time, he said that it was difficult to be absolutely clear about the relationship.

At one point I asked him if there was the possibility that the connections he drew between his practice and his teaching might be more of a reflection of his maturing as a teacher and a human being. He responded, saying: "You know you can't answer that question. It's hypothetical. Because my practice has become part of my life, so that has been important. So it's difficult for me to say whether if I hadn't a practice, whether I would have developed the same way or not. It's difficult. I can see the practice as part of my spiritual development, my maturity. I consider that as a part of my life. So practicing has, practicing along with everything else, has lead me to where I am and has made me recognize that there is a long way to go as well." As in the other interviews, it is important to maintain this view of the difficulty of drawing clear causal or developmental connections between involvement with Buddhism and/or Shambhala training, and the changes experienced. In fact, this should be the context in which
everything is viewed. That said, there were a number of interesting connections that Ron did make.

**Practice and Practices**

Before looking at the connections, it is worth presenting Ron’s description of his meditation practice and the general effect it has in his life. When I asked him to describe his formal practice, he told me that “I sit and I focus on breathing and recognizing my thoughts, identifying thought and just sort of coming back to my breath and just sort of an all around awareness, not just when you are sitting but an awareness while you are walking, while you are working or in the classroom, and all of a sudden you recognize something and you say wow, and it brings you right back to where you are, to the present.” He was clear that the effect of coming back to the present was something that happened in all aspects of his life, including his formal practice, teaching and private life. “Yeah there certainly have been effects in my normal life. And I mean I find the actual practice, the sitting practice is really beneficial in that sense that really you are able come back when you are floating off somewhere or day dreaming or something and you are able to come back and focus on what’s going on in the present moment. I find that beneficial.”

As Ron is involved with Shambhala training, and has not done any Buddhist programs, the only practices he did at the time of the interviews were sitting meditation and the raising windhorse practice. As mentioned above, he was taking a hiatus from practice and from involvement with the community, but still saw himself as connected to the practices and the community.

One interesting effect of not practicing was that he was aware of the absence of the benefits of practice. We discussed trust and awareness, and the
ways in which practice helped to promote these qualities and the difference experienced when one does not practice regularly. In this context, Ron said that he thought “that you are more aware of them through the sitting practice. And I know that for a fact because I haven’t sat for a while and I think my awareness of it has clouded a bit and it’s not as clear and vivid. So yeah it sort of makes the picture clearer.” In a discussion about his experiences of the windhorse practice and sitting practice, he mentioned that “I find the sitting practice to be perhaps the most powerful practice. As a matter of fact my new girlfriend said that she can see when I have sat and when I haven’t sat just in terms of the way I walk.

At the same time, Ron told me about some more direct connections with his teaching practice. Regarding the windhorse practice, Ron told me that the difficulty was that “you have to remember that you have to do it and that’s not always an easy thing to do.” However, when he did do it, he said that he found “it to be very beneficial. Yeah, definitely just being able to put your shoulders back and put your head up high, even that giving you that sense of dignity when you are in a situation.” At the beginning of one interview, he mentioned that he had done it that day. “I did raise Windhorse today as I was coming into the classroom. For some reason I was feeling really down and I had left the classroom .... just before I came to the door, I thought to myself this is a good time to raise Windhorse because I was getting really down .... I mean I haven’t really done it for a while and I thought hey this is a good time to do it so I just did it: shoulders back and felt it go out, come in and just contacted with myself.”

With the Students

Another indication of the power of practice was that Ron had taught his students a simplified form of meditation. While he was aware that it was
politically dangerous, he said that he “didn’t put any name to it. I just said we are just going to try some breathing exercise, is basically what I said. A relaxation technique or something like that.” He added that “I am not asking them to pray, I am asking them to relax. And I did a little bit of labeling. I said if a thought arises just say oh I have a thought.” Most importantly, he told me that “the kids really loved it.” His description is quite interesting, so I will present it in full:

I have done it twice and I don’t know how much I am supposed to be doing this but, because I am not a [meditation] teacher, but just being able to have them try the breathing technique it’s been great. We had a Christmas concert and they were all quite hyper and anxious and what not and this was one of the rehearsals we were having and we were just waiting and we were going to watch somebody perform and they had just sort of finished their rehearsal, my class had finished their rehearsal, and sitting in their chairs and we were waiting for this group to come down the stairs and it was about five minutes we were waiting there. Those five minutes I got them into doing some breathing technique and sitting with their eyes, you know, sitting with their hands on their laps and just breathing and listening to their breath come out. And boy, they were just, they really got into it and I have never seen a group of students go from such hyper activity the way they were, sort of moving around the chairs and jumping up and down and shouting and then just calm right down. It was great it’s a good classroom behavioural technique. And now, I did it twice, and now if I just say to them okay push back your chairs and put your hands on your laps, they know exactly what to do. So it’s fun to watch.

Limitations, Trust and Coming Back
Ron did not see practice as a way to avoid difficulties in life. He told me that "there are times when you miss a lot as a teacher and just being able to sort of bring yourself back. There are times when, I mean it happens still, I mean practice has helped me, but it certainly hasn’t cured me and I don’t think it cures anybody really. But there are times when you are concentrating so much on paper work or on other things or on getting an assignment done or getting the kids to get an assignment done that you miss the process, you know, you miss how the kids are working."

This example points to one of the major influences practice has had on Ron. He said that teachers make many unconscious decisions and that practice made those decisions more accessible and therefore more workable. "It’s sort of the difference, the unconscious and the conscious decision idea of what you are doing. Unconsciously we do a lot of these things that are in practice. For me that was what attracted me to this practice initially because unconsciously I was doing this but the practice made it a conscious thing. And that made it so much more rewarding for me and so much more more practical. I mean being able to do it and recognizing that this is what you are doing."

Self-assessment was closely related to the issue of making the "unconscious" "conscious". Ron felt that most teachers understood that "On a professional basis teachers really have to continuously evaluate themselves in what they are doing in the classroom, whether things are working or not, otherwise class management and kids’ learning processes will fall apart so it is important if you are going to survive, to be able to evaluate where you are and what you are doing." In his opinion, self-assessment was a natural part of the teaching process. "Just by evaluating kids work you are evaluating yourselves consciously, I mean you’re just looking at it and as you are marking you just say
perhaps I should go over this again or I just really messed up on this one, obviously the kids didn’t understand this because they are all getting it wrong. I mean you have to make, I can’t understand and I don’t know of any teacher who wouldn’t make that conscious evaluative process.”

According to Ron, there are some unfortunate teachers who have difficulty with self-assessment. He felt that this difficulty was often related to a lack of self-trust. “Well I mean it is painful because they are the teachers that again don’t trust themselves so they are the ones who have the kids in the classroom who are going wild because they don’t have that critical assessment of what they are doing. And they just put the blinders on and just let it happen. And they are the teachers that have a bunch of kids down at the office because they have to keep on sending them down because class management isn’t working.” However, in Ron’s experience, such teachers were “very rare.”

Ron felt that the connection between sitting practice and the process of self-assessment was fairly clear, although again, he mentioned that “On a personal level I suppose I do, but again I don’t know if it’s the quality of me being a teacher that’s developed or whether I have had that all the time. So it’s hard to say.” Bearing this in mind, when I asked him if he saw a connection, he responded saying: “I think it [the connection] is blatantly clear to me that, I was going to say second guessing, but it’s not second guessing, evaluating as you are going along - what it is that you have accomplished and what it is that you haven’t accomplished and what is it that you can do better and what is it that you can improve upon - and to me it’s obvious.” He did note a difference between the process of meditation and the development of self-assessment through the practice of teaching. “I think with the Dharma it’s more of a, I mean it’s less focused on something specific. With teaching it’s very specific; you are not thinking of yourself as a whole being. Perhaps you do unconsciously make that,
take it with you. With the Dharma you think of yourself as not only just at your work, with your relationships and with, and I mean I can't think of sitting down and evaluating my relationships in teaching right? But with the Dharma you do.”

A part of the difference can be described as the difference between meditation and post-meditation experience. Ron described an aspect of this difference as being the quality of the moments of reflection or self awareness. He wondered whether “when you are teaching, whether you are making it a conscious evaluation. When you are evaluating yourself, are you saying to yourself oh yeah, now I am evaluating what I have accomplished in this thing. Or are you just saying well I did this wrong, I can do something better with it.” Another way he described that moment was “just continuing with the thinking and just saying I can do better than that, here, better start breathing again or something like that, you know.” This he contrasted with the experience in sitting practice where “It’s sort of like having the thought and recognizing that thought and saying yeah, oh yeah, I was thinking.” In other words, the experience is clearly recognized and touched briefly before returning to the breath. Ron summed up the difference, saying: “It seems that when you are teaching there is no moment there, well maybe there is but you don’t recognize the moment as much as you do with your sitting practice.”

Returning to the issue of trust, Ron felt that practice helped his sense of trusting himself “Only in the sense I am aware when I am making those decisions that yes I am trusting myself to this decision.” He saw that other teachers “are capable of making that decision without the practice. And I have seen teachers saying we are doing that, making the decision to trust in themselves and being aware that that’s what they are doing. And they have no practice at all. But for me it has helped me become more aware of that’s what I am doing.”
Challenges

Another effect practice has had in Ron’s career as a teacher, as well as in his personal life, was in his “desire to challenge himself. I think that is where it has helped me the most.” He felt that practice had helped him “To recognize that there are certain things that I have become complacent in.” Before he had become involved in Shambhala training, he said that he had felt that “okay, getting by is fine in these areas.”

More recently, he found that “The practice for me has made a very significant impact on forcing myself to do something that normally I wouldn’t do. He gave the example of “taking a course in ESL. I probably wouldn’t have thought of that if it wasn’t for the Shambhala talks and levels that I’ve taken. I was very content with just staying a classroom teacher and just not worrying about anything else like taking courses or studying to improve myself, but just to stay in the classroom and teach in the classroom because I really enjoy teaching in the classroom. But to recognize that you know, I could probably make my life more full if I took courses and challenged myself. So in that sense that’s probably where the practice has had the most impact for me.” This theme of facing challenges was in many ways a thread that connected Ron’s approach to many of the issues mentioned above such as being straightforward, as well as decision making and self-assessment.

Working With Emotions

Ron spoke about various ways in which he felt meditation had helped him to work with his emotions. As discussed above, he had been able to work with
the fear of being straightforward, and felt that he was better able to express
what he actually felt about things than in the past. He also spoke of certain
characteristics which he felt were important for teachers in general, and which he
had been working with, such as patience, compassion, understanding and
working with anger. Speaking of emotional responses to situations, he said that
in the past “I kept them in and let them build up and then explode. In the last
year I’ve been able to accept things and just sort of, I will be able to talk about
them a lot more freely then I ever have in the past. He connected this with the
meditation practice, saying that “it certainly benefited my life or improved the
quality of my life in the sense I am certainly much more aware of things that are
going on, recognizing a lot of things about myself that I have never noticed
about myself .... And just the feeling, the patience factor as well. I find myself to
be able to touch things and let them go. A lot easier then I had in the past.”

Ron saw this effect in other aspects of his life as well. He gave an example
from his new relationship: “I am in the beginnings of a new relationship and it
certainly has had an effect on that relationship. I am feeling as if I am more free
to discuss those feelings, emotions or what I am feeling at a particular time. And
recognizing that it’s not necessarily the other person’s fault or the fault of the
relationship, it’s my perception of what’s going on that often causes emotional
stress or insecurity. And being able to recognize that, you know, yeah it’s me -
perhaps I am tired that day or something like that, and just saying I am just tired
you know, and just let it go and tomorrow is another day and this relationship
has got a lot of positive qualities about it, and just recognize them and identify
those positive qualities and go over it in your mind.”

Understanding and compassion were also mentioned by Ron as qualities
that he felt he was better able to manifest in the classroom, at least partially
through his practice. At the beginning of the second interview, he told me that
he had “reflected upon this [the connection between practice and teaching] and thought about how my, just my practice has affected me in the classroom and I feel it certainly has made me a more understanding teacher and a more compassionate teacher and able to deal, I think, with my frustrations in a calmer and clearer manner than I had before.”

Describing the actual experience in the moment, he said that “I find myself quite often in fits of anger or moments of frustration just being able to bring myself back to the reality and sort of trying to connect with the student on a more personal level rather than just trying to deal with my frustrations, trying to let go of my frustrations, being able to just look within myself and also recognize the background of the student as well before exploding.” Again, he hesitated about drawing too direct a connection with practice, as he felt that his professional experience was also a factor. “This might be my practice, it might be not be, it's hard to say, but it might just be experience. I have become in the last two or three years a much calmer teacher and a lot less likely to use a loud voice or anger to control my students. I find it much easier to do so in a much calmer, quiet manner and I believe the practice has something to do with that and I also believe experience has something to do it as well.”

One point that he made was that meditation and his general involvement with Shambhala training was not a cure-all for problems. That is to say, issues such as anger, frustration and impatience did not go away, it just made them more workable to be able to touch them and sometimes to share the frustration with someone. As he said: “I mean it doesn’t make everything rosy of course because you still feel that there is something wrong, but just by identifying them it helps .... You are able to deal with them a lot better. Sometimes they do go away. I mean sometimes they definitely do go away and practice helps that. But there are times when no, they don’t go away, they still stick around and they still
bother you and they still - a bad itch - still there. Just being able to sometimes say yeah, I got an itch.”

As is evident in the above discussions, teaching is a good place for a practitioner to work. There are ample opportunities to work with emotions and apply the practices and teachings to real life situations. In many ways, the environments established by teachers are resonant with the kinds of social vision found in spiritual traditions, and most decidedly so with the Shambhalian vision of creating enlightened society. I asked Ron if he felt that teachers’ personal lives reflected this resonance. He told me that “In the staff room you often hear more complaints about teachers’ personal lives than you do about their classroom and what’s happening in their classroom. That’s interesting and I really recognized that as being an aspect of it. I mean even on the complaining level, they can’t take what they are doing in the classroom outside the classroom and apply it to their lives. And there are lot of teachers who have very difficult lives.” As with David’s comment at the end of his narrative, this issue will be discussed further in the analysis chapter.

**Reading and Listening**

Another source of support for his spiritual path was through study and the talks at the Shambhala levels. There was one particularly memorable event that Ron told me about which relates to Ron’s feelings of having become calmer and better able to work with his emotions.

“I remember one of the teachers that I took one of the levels with, he often would say Just doesn’t matter, just doesn’t matter, just doesn’t fucking matter. And it was great ‘cause it’s true you know, all that anger you have, all that frustration, basically it doesn’t matter and I think to me
it was a very crucial moment in my practice recognizing that all the circumstances and frustrations, and all the things that lead up to that frustration, just by recognizing that okay, this is one of those days when I am really frustrated. Why do I need to take it out on a child? I mean I don’t, I just need to look at it and say it just doesn’t matter. And being able to realize that was a big step for me and it has led to me being a lot calmer.

One difficulty that sometimes occurs when spiritual insights and epiphanies occur such as the one described above, is the possibility that they can become solidified and eventually undermine themselves. An example of such a solidification, and one that is sometimes leveled against practitioners of meditation is that there can develop a sense of not caring about things in the ‘real’ world and of becoming overly detached. Ron responded to that possibility in the following passage:

It doesn’t matter for me getting frustrated and getting angry - that doesn’t matter. I have been able to recognize that. But it doesn’t mean that I don’t care. There is a difference, I mean not mattering and not caring are two things. I mean I do care, I care a lot, but just by being able to recognize and point out to myself that, okay I am frustrated, let it go now I can deal better, on a better level with the child. I can relate to the child better rather than exploding on him because it’s obvious if you explode on a child they are going to cut themselves off from you. And just being able to relate with them in a calm manner, it gets more accomplished. So it does matter. By saying it doesn’t matter, does matter. It’s very ironic that way but it’s true.

Contemplating apparent paradoxes and developing an understanding of the nature of mind is also supported through study and reading. Ron felt that in
regard to "the philosophy behind it, I am just beginning to understand and research and explore, so I am not really well versed in it. Other than to a certain extent. I mean I've read Chogyam Trungpa's works, some of his works. And it certainly is enlightening." He felt that studying the philosophy helped to make his overall life philosophy "whole." He told me that "I mean all these things I thought of in the past. The good thing about reading about it, it gives some sort of justification to what you've been thinking of in the past and it really synthesizes things nicely into sort of compact - yeah that's what I've been thinking about in the past." Ron saw the process of studying and contemplating to be "like a jigsaw puzzle. You have the pieces, but until you read about it you can't really put them together without the instruction."

Through studying, Ron has also absorbed the vocabulary of Shambhala training. One of the motifs in Shambhala training is the image of enlightened warriorship. Ron found that most often he would not use the vocabulary overtly with colleagues and students. He said that this "might be a conscious decision on my part so that I don't get that weird look." However, his thinking was coloured by terms from his study and practice. He told me that "In the classroom I see the kids, they get into a really tense situation and I often say: 'It just doesn't matter, no big deal.' 'Just relax and it's no big deal - no reason to be uptight about that.' But the idea of pushing myself and challenging myself and stepping beyond outside the Cocoon type of thing, those things I generally do." In the last passage, the word 'cocoon' is taken from Shambhala training. Rather than the more recent common usage as a term referring to couples building comfortable nests in the 80's And 90's, it refers to the tendency to insulate oneself from the world. In general, he found that "When I am at the center I relate it to being a Warrior but when I am here [at school] I don't. Yeah there is some language that comes across, some of it stays at the center."
Summing up

There was one passage from the interviews that I feel captures much of Ron’s relationship with meditation and Shambhala training, and provides a good final statement for this section. I will leave Ron’s narrative with his words:

I would, I mean I have, I am known in the school as the sitter because I have done meditation and people have been quite interested in it although none of them wanted to do it themselves. But they have looked at me and asked me questions and talked to me about it. Basically I just say to them it has had a very powerful effect on, sort of the relevancy of my life - I don’t know how to express it. I would say to them it has made me a lot more aware how important life is and how important living each moment is. I also - and I would say this to my closer friends - it’s also, I have been able to, it acts as a sort of focal point for me, What’s the right word, synthesized everything that I believed in the past into something that is very straightforward and sort of more easily understood. Because I have always had these things. Part of my development, I have Crohn’s disease, I have physically suffered. I have had several operations and I have always thought how important it is to be living strongly in the moment and being able to have the practice there has been something that sort of provided me with guidance and a focal point.
Susan: Providing Alternatives

I have known Susan for six years. Over that period, most of our encounters have been at the Wednesday and Monday open houses where anyone is invited to practice meditation, get mediation instruction if they want it, and afterwards stay for tea and cookies and sometimes a talk on Buddhism or the Shambhala teachings. I have also been the recipient of Susan’s generosity through the use of her cottage about an hour north of Toronto. For two and a half years, I ran a service group within the sangha in Toronto, and every year she kindly lent us her cottage for a weekend retreat program.

Visiting her cottage was in many ways like stepping into Susan’s mind. It’s a delightful place, nestled up against low hills, with a swimming pond fed by a spring. The house is full of instruments, books, bric a brac from her travels around the world, horse blankets, and an overall sense of cozy, eclectic comfort. The building itself is a kind of overgrown log cabin with two floors, two bedrooms, a substantial kitchen outfitted with two beds, each with roll-out extra beds underneath, and of course there’s a large living room filled with over and under stuffed furniture that begs to be lollyed on. Around the cottage there is a small barn for her horse and acres of trees and fields for walks and quiet contemplation, for riding her horse. The feeling up there is one of comfortable, informal hospitality. The many books and instruments are there to be played, if you feel so inspired, while the grounds and the pond are impossible to pass up - when I was there, I swam at least three times each day.
In my mind, the similarity mentioned above, occurs on a number of levels. Susan sees herself as a teacher who offers alternatives to her students, without proselytizing. At her school, she is a self described “connection maker” who invests a lot of energy putting together different groups and interests. Her approach combines traditional pedagogy while she also likes “to share different enthusiasms I have on the side with the kids.” She told me that she tries “to do a bunch of different things, you know, I do chants [language skill developing] and songs and whatever to get some energy up in the room. And you know do the proper exercises so they get lots of practice and do cultural things to motivate them to get, feel excited about it. So when you go to Paris, the reality that yes, this is something that you are going to use because I want, I’d love it if their horizons included some of these things.”

Around the time of the interviews, she had invited her Acadian fiddle teacher to visit her French class, and combined that visit with time spent with students from the music department where he gave fiddle and guitar workshops. Outside of school hours, she searches for movies, books, and activities that would support the school activities. She has even taken groups of students to her farm for winter camping, an experience that many of the students who are immigrants or children of immigrants have never even considered as an option. Another example Susan gave was of taking students from her generally lower middle class neighbourhood to the Art Gallery of Ontario. She told me that “We took the whole class down to the art gallery I don’t think any of them have been there. They loved it and they were going to go back .... that isn’t one of the things they’ve had.” To return to the cottage, so
to speak, her drive to “feed people with information” is reflected in the heaps of books, videos and tapes stored there and brought to life in her classroom and in her relations with the other teachers at her high school.

Her interest in teaching began when she was a child, but, as she put it, “it’s in the genes” as two of her aunts in Norway were university professors, and one of them had been the head of a teachers college. As a child she subjected people to lessons on anything that came to mind. For example she told me that as a girl “I wanted to be a teacher and I taught everybody everything they didn’t want to know. My poor stepmother, she had to learn the parts of the bridle and the saddle, so it was long drives up the cottage and stuff or camping.”

For Susan, communicating and opening doors through information, combined with sharing information that she feels passionate about is at the core of her love of teaching. “For me it was a matter of communicating information that I think’s interesting, that I think people would really love to know. And so that’s my best teaching I think .... I guess my basis was, it’s kind of transmitting information and watching people thinking that their horizons are broadening with that and they go out sort of more equipped to enjoy all those things that are out there in the world.” Her passion for traveling supports this as she has had lots of first hand experience with the joys of being able to speak to people in distant countries in their native languages. At the same time, her passion for teaching goes through the same cycles that most teachers experience, and during the difficult periods, “It’s the money that keeps me in the game.” However overall I had the impression of a teacher who loved her work and felt that teaching was more like a calling than just a way to sustain herself.

At university she majored in modern languages. After graduation, she had applied to work at Expo in Japan as a Canadian representative, but was not accepted until after she had already made plans for an around the world trip. If
she had gone to Japan, Susan feels that things might have turned out differently. As she said: “But they called me after I had left for my trip around the world in 69-70 for that job, and who knows where I’d have ended up after that.” As it was, she returned to Canada, decided that given the available options of translating and teaching, she would go to teachers’ college. And so as she put it “I sort of almost fell into teaching.” She started teaching in 1972. Her subject areas were Spanish, French, History and English as a Second Language, and she also has qualifications for music and library.

Throughout her life, Buddhism has been a sometimes small, but non-the-less present thread. She told me that “For me it does seem Buddhism has been the thing, that sort of constant thread, and my mother sort of knew that, and she gave me the Buddha [referring to a statue of the Buddha in the room we were in].” In the late sixties, Trungpa Rinpoche was in Toronto for a few months, but although she “knew about Trungpa being down the street when [a friend] lived down the street from us - that was in 1965 in Toronto, but I didn’t go.” Susan read a book by Trungpa Rinpoche but didn’t get involved in the sangha until many years later. Instead, she went on a trip to Peru in the early seventies where she met a Buddhist teacher who was actually born and raised in Toronto named Namgyal Rinpoche.

She “hung around the edges of the group” in Peru, but didn’t further the connection upon her return to Toronto. Instead, when she was back in Toronto, she became quite seriously involved with yoga. She told me that she “went to the yoga centre and I took the yoga teacher training course. That was pretty intensive for a year. I got training in various aspects of yoga and physical and breathing and all the different types.” She was very interested in the breathing and the other physical elements of the yoga practice, while at the same time she was exploring massage, energy work, psychic awareness, shiatsu and reiki body
work. In her own words, Susan was “country before country was hip and new age before it existed.”

Susan continued doing various weekend programs in different disciplines, but did not finish her yoga program as she found it difficult to raise the energy to maintain a journal and do the other paper work - she describes herself in general as having an “allergy to paper work” - and she also never got around to writing the anatomy exam. At the time of the exam, she said that “There was a chaotic situation at home, and then I sold my house and left Canada and went to Africa for a year. So that was that kind of background and then you know I cut off connections with things Buddhist.” In retrospect, she said that “It just didn’t seem I was ready to do that. I guess I got more into massage and energy work, healing kind of stuff.” This period after returning from Peru she described as being “quite far from mediation.”

Initial Involvement in the Sangha: Hopes and Expectations

The situation changed when Susan’s dog died in the mid-nineties. At that time, she ran into an old friend who pops up in her life from time to time. Don had been involved in the sangha for many years, and he suggested that she try meditation as Susan was “pretty shattered” after her dog’s death. On Don’s advice, Susan went to the Toronto Shambhala Center, got meditation instruction, began to sit and started doing Shambhala levels. These weekend programs are a series of weekends which introduce a new practitioner to the practice of meditation while also presenting teachings on the experience of meditation, and then a follow-up series of weekend programs which go into more depth on the philosophy while also introducing practices such as raising lungta. After one has finished these two cycles of programs, there are longer ten day and two week
programs which introduce further teachings and practices in a group retreat environment.

The first night Susan got meditation instruction, she attended a talk given afterwards. The speaker mentioned that “You shouldn’t expect to suddenly become a calm and serene person just because you are sitting”, a message reinforced by comments made by other practitioners in the audience during the discussion afterward. Nonetheless, based on her experience and from conversations with other beginners, Susan felt that “people usually get into meditation .... seeking some kind of peace, or joy - maybe a high.” In her case she was searching for solace after the death of her dog, and although she understood that having expectations is problematic, she found that it was difficult to let go of those hopes.

At the time of the interviews, Susan had finished the first five levels of the weekend programs. However, she told me that she “just sort of went through the levels .... So I’ve done that but I haven’t kept up the practice in between and that’s pretty well the history. And I know that it benefits me tremendously I know that I really feel that it’s good to do it, it’s just that I don’t discipline myself to do it.” She does come to some of the open houses on Monday and Wednesday nights for meditation, and finds them to be helpful experiences, however there is a sense of struggle in her relationship with her practice.

A part of the struggle comes from her full schedule. Susan’s life is very full, with teaching, her horse, dog, music, cottage, family and friends, each of which demands an enormous amount of attention, time and energy, and which at the same time provides much in the way of satisfaction. She likes to get to school at around 8:00, and after eating breakfast and walking her dog, she doesn’t have the time to practice in the mornings. After school, she finds that she is drained of energy and lacks the motivation to have regular practice. As she
said: "And at the end of a teaching day it’s tiring and I don’t feel like going out that much.” Even going to the Shambhala center can be a struggle. When I asked her if she ever regretted going when she did go, her response was an unequivocal “no”. And when I asked her how she felt about her relationship with practice, she responded: “I think I made it quite clear how I feel about that. I know it’s dumb and it’s not very helpful, I feel like a slacker who knows better. And sometimes I think I’ll go to Warriors Assembly [a ten day retreat program in the Shambhala tradition], or do a dathun [a one month Buddhist shamatha group retreat] or a weekthun [a one week version of a dathun], and I think, well I should be able to do that, but I know that when I’m in my own space there’s not much connection to practice.”

Susan’s relationship with practice is reflected, or perhaps reflects other aspects of her life. She said that when she has to do something, she puts a lot of energy into it and does it well, but she finds it hard to organize herself to get things such as marking and writing report cards done in a timely manner, or to be consistent and regular in maintaining any discipline. She described getting into bed with report cards around her and thinking that if she “just has them there, somehow they’ll get done.” However in the report card example she gave me, she watched a little television and then, overcome with tiredness at the end of a long working day, she went to sleep.

She summed up her experience saying: “But I know I feel better after doing it but I don’t maintain it, it’s more a kind of a characteristic of my personality too. That if there’s a task to be done I will do it and I put a lot of energy into it, but in terms of steady maintenance practice of any health issue whether it’s eating properly or exercising or sitting, it’s sporadic. Even though I recognize the benefits. A certain lack of discipline for which I flagellate myself regularly but don’t conquer it much.”
Shambhala Levels - Weekend programs

As seen above, the majority of Susan’s practice is in the context of weekend programs - so far all Shambhala levels - and going to the open houses on Monday and Wednesday nights. Susan spoke of how after doing a Shambhala weekend program or going to sit for an hour on a Monday or Wednesday evening, the effects were striking. She described it as “taking my mind to the laundry.” A mundane example of how she experienced the difference was in her normal routine of listening to the radio on the way to work in the car. “I remember the impression after the first weekend was a very strong one. My usual habit is to get up in the morning, turn on the radio in the car and drive to work. I couldn’t listen to the radio for two or three days there I just, ugh.”

After the second weekend, she had an altercation with some students which surprised her in it’s intensity. The students were playing music very loudly in the hall and she asked them to turn it down. They “just blew up in my face and I went right up with them.” She told me that it was “Very unusual, that kind of intensity with a kid, very rare.” For Susan, this experience reinforced her recognition that the path is not one of short term gains, and that “Sitting for a weekend is not going to guarantee that everything is going to be serene.” Another way of looking at the event is that it left the door open as to what the results and benefits are. As she put it: “Well it certainly showed me that it wasn’t what I thought necessarily.”

Instead of her hoped for serenity, she found the effects to be more of becoming closer to what was actually happening in her life. She described this, saying that “It was like that it could really be in your face still and even more
intensely than before. She found that from the second weekend on, "my experience from then .... it's been the same order." She also found that the initial resistance to spending an entire weekend devoted to practice did not go away. "I kind of sit through it fairly grimly and than the light eventually goes on and I just feel that it was the right thing to have done even though there are a million other things that I should or could have done that weekend. It's good to just go and sit there. Very Protestant."

Bearing in mind that there are no guarantees of great life changes in the short term, Susan was still able to state that in general she finds the weekend programs help her productivity and general state of mind. Although before a weekend she is "freaked out because I am taking a weekend out of my life, and yet I make up for it afterwards in general productivity by having a more direct kind of engine for what needs to be done."

Many new practitioners begin with weekend programs and have difficulty establishing a regular practice. They also bring with them expectations and hopes for what practice will do for them. Susan spoke of an interview she heard on the radio with a Buddhist teacher named Ram Dass who said that practice is more about "clearing away the veils to everything that's there, rather than feeling that you have to add." He also said that when he "got into that space of where he wasn't mired in wherever he was at that particular moment, he could look down and feel tremendous compassion for himself, going through all these things .... having to do it over and over again."

While the message of not trying to build whatever qualities one felt were spiritual, but rather clearing away the confusion resonated with Susan, she still felt some misgivings about the possibility of "just settling for being a slob." This conflict between feeling the need to improve, and allowing what exists within us, hidden by our confusion to emerge, is at the crux of many of the difficulties
experienced by new practitioners. The equanimity expressed by the more senior practitioners seems to develop naturally as a result of going through years of experiencing the same habitual patterns recurring in practice and in life situations such as teaching, and being able to develop the compassion for oneself and others that Ram Dass spoke of.
Reservations about Involvement

Susan told me that she has problems with becoming too involved in the sangha. She said that she “already has family and that’s my community and so I feel guilty because I really appreciate all the work that you guys do to keep the center going.” However, at the same time she felt that she was able to contribute in other ways such as “pay[ing] my dues, that’s something that other people can’t do in the community.” This is actually quite a significant thing as there are many people in the sangha who are barely making ends meet, and the community is constantly struggling to pay the rent and cover costs on programs.

Susan also has reservations about the founder of the sangha, Trungpa Rinpoche. He had been a monk, but by the time he came to North America, he had ‘taken his robes off’ as is said when one stops being a monk, and he drank and had lovers, to mention a few of the things that people sometimes have difficulty with. Trungpa Rinpoche was more in the line of crazy wisdom teachers wherein the teachers would engage in activities that might seem questionable, but held profound teachings. This history gives some people pause for thought, and as Susan said: “Well he is a bit problematic for me because the whole business of his life and his accident and his physical challenges and his drinking and stuff like that - all of that is a little problematic I think for a lot of people entering this group. You sort of expect the, the teacher to have been more an exemplar of saintliness or something. So it’s a difficult one actually I think. That’s one of the difficulties with it.”

While Susan had some reservations about the sangha, at the same time she told me that she trusted the people at the center. She recognized “a decency in the people and a sincerity that they are all on the path.” She added that “It
seems to be a pretty good place to be doing this, this path you know, but again the process seems to work and the people who are in the Sangha are people that I trust .... and it sort of, you know it's okay. And that's important - like I don't feel there is an element of hucksterism or, or trying to drag anyone through or into anything. It's just people wanting to share and that's nice. People really putting a lot of energy into it too, I mean people who do, who keep the centre going in all the different ways. I appreciate it."
Study

An important aspect of entering the dharma is study. As mentioned previously, study and practice are seen as necessary and complimentary components of the Buddhist path. At the time of the interviews, Susan had attended a number of the open house talks where Buddhist and Shambhala teachings are presented. However, most of her study had been in the context of the Shambhala weekend programs. On these weekends, there is an emphasis on practice, but there are also usually three or four talks with discussion groups afterward, and private interviews are held with meditation instructors twice over the weekend. Of course, Susan has been reading about Buddhism as well as a wide range of spiritual traditions over the years, and had significant experience in yoga and related areas.

One of the things which attracts her to Buddhism is the way that the world view it presents is more inclusive and explanatory than traditions she had previously studied. In her experience, what she had studied previously “didn’t account for all the sad and other things in material life and Buddhism seems to have a place for it.” It helped her see the suffering she experienced in the loss of her dog as being “a part of something, it doesn’t just say, well sorry you are wrong you know, you are just thinking wrong.”

While Susan recognized that there is a sense in which Buddhist teachings do acknowledge that one’s attitude toward experience and one’s emotional experience is largely the product of one’s mind, there still seemed to Susan to be a more inclusive and encompassing philosophical basis to Buddhism. As she said: “Buddhism allows for daily life in all the awkward things that are there as well as the spirit, whatever that is.” She expressed her desire to study more as there
were still areas which she didn’t understand or didn’t accept, such as reincarnation and some aspects of the bodhisattva path as discussed in chapter four. She had trouble with “The whole Bodhisattva being based on the idea you just keep doing it and then you’ll just keep doing it until everybody gets it right.” However, so far what she had heard and what she had studied complemented each other and expanded on what she had studied in other traditions. She also liked the simplicity of sitting meditation and saw potential for ego extensions and distortions in what she called “the energy stuff”. Working with subtle energies can turn into an ego trip where one develops a sense of power, further solidifying the ego boundaries, whereas according to Susan, in the simplicity of meditation there is no “mistaking sitting there with your eyes open.”
Previous Influences

The presence of the influence of previous traditions was also noticeable in her use of terminology. She used terms from Shambhalian and Buddhist terminology, and also would use expressions and descriptions of experience that came from earlier energy work. This was most noticeably apparent in her descriptions of the ways her involvement with Buddhism influenced her work in the classroom.

In one example, Susan spoke of working with students' posture. She didn't talk about raising windhorse, or holding the space, but she did talk about the responsibility of all members of the class to be present. She finds that posture is extremely helpful and gives the students instruction on how to sit so as to stay awake and bring up their energy. "I talk about posture with my students as I think it's so important. Nobody ever does it seems. And I, when I sit and I talk about their solar plexus, you know: the sunshine, when they sit up straight the sun shines in the classroom. It's such a difference it's amazing."

Susan also felt that working with posture resonated with her practice. "And I find that just assuming posture is already such a way of being present that it's, so I guess at that moment it [Buddhism and practice] might just come back for a moment because there is that correlation." She also appreciated that this was an opportunity to share some of the path of Buddhism without any sense of proselytizing. "Being present in the moment and actually calling them to be present without them realizing the whole paraphernalia that goes with it." She even empowered them to remind her of her posture when they felt she needed to radiate more and be more present.
Restraints in the School Environment

One factor she spoke of that inhibits her is the potential reactions of some Christian members of the school community. In the seventies, she was more willing to take chances and had taught her students ways to relax based on her yoga training. She also briefly tried teaching languages using the Lozanov or 'Super Learning Technique'. She told me that "The process involved bringing students to a relaxed state, listening to baroque music and being more receptive to vocabulary in this condition. Some students found this 'meditation' a helpful insight into some possibilities of their minds. Some couldn’t handle it either out of nervousness or because they were beginning to experience what sounded to me like astral travel. And so I stopped using it even though some of them kept asking for it." She had also taught the students and teachers about massage. She saw herself as being different from the norm, but still felt that "generally my colleagues were sort of quite indulgent and accepting and sort of liked that. And you know I sort of turned the staff room into a massage parlour basically for awhile and everybody was nice to each and other rubbed each others shoulders and stuff .... I mean there was just much more interaction. The people who come from other schools, they come for a day, fill in kind of stuff and they would comment on the fact that it was quite a warm staff room."

However, with a grade ten class going through the stress of exams, she had tried to introduce a way for them to relax based on meditation. Although she had acknowledged that she was not a qualified meditation instructor - in our sangha, to become a meditation instructor takes a significant amount of training - she thought that "just a little bit of sitting there with their eyes open and staying with their breathing .... I figured it’s a useful thing to know." She didn’t
tell the students it was Buddhist, but rather that it was like yoga. One Greek student came to her and told her that “yoga is from the devil.” In her words, “that scotched it.”, and so she didn’t proceed with the instruction.

Adding to the sense of restraint described above, there is the general danger these days of making any physical contact with students. While some of the students are “just crying out to be hugged” the union representatives had made it clear that the teachers should not engage in that kind of behaviour as they could be sued. For this reason, even massage is outside of what is acceptable in the classroom. Despite these impediments, Susan does try to imbue her classes with a sense of the potential for an uplifted, curious relationship with life, and feels that even if she is only able to present this view in small amounts and limited ways, and even if the students don’t really understand all of what she is saying, she hopes and believes that “if they hear it once, they may hear it the second time when they need it or want to.”
Teaching and Practice

At the time of the interviews, Susan hoped that her meditation practice would help her to become a good model of “a nice steady adult” and to be able to radiate “more steadiness in the space for the kids to learn and for them to experience that kind of feeling.” She recognized that some of them “are already like that more than I am.” This aspirational quality is representative of Susan’s relationship with Buddhism. As expressed above, Susan still feels that she is a newcomer to meditation practice, and as such she was reticent to ascribe too many effects to her practice and general involvement. At the same time, she was clear that she saw the benefits, most often in the periods after weekend programs.

Another thing she was clear about was that teaching is a good profession for a practitioner. Susan made an analogy between teaching and dance. She described teaching as being a profession where you have to be “absolutely right there.” She also described the experience in the classroom as being “that wonderful flow .... it’s just magic.” However, the amount of energy needed to maintain this state is enormous. As she said in another comparison: “It’s like an actor at the end of, I mean I really do put out the kind of energy that an actor puts out on the stage when you are doing it for four hours in the classroom .... I mean somebody doing Hamlet - that’s a long play. There’s still not four hours .... I mean I know that you should set it up so that they are doing a lot of the stuff too. So it doesn’t mean emoting for four full hours. Still, being there, watching the connections and trying to facilitate the connections if I am not actually putting it out, responding to them - I guess it’s still a four full hours of being right there.”
From her description of the amount of energy it takes to teach well, Susan made a connection with what in her mind was an example of the interconnection between teaching and practice. She told me that she had been "thinking about it in the last week or so and wondering if there is some kind of interpenetration of the world view that comes ideally from sitting and interactions with students and situations, like a certain easing up on stuff a bit because I should know that kind of just letting things be. Or accepting them the way they are as sort of appropriate. I am not sure that I know what I am talking about but I guess spaciousness, I guess the concept of spaciousness letting that be there more as a result of sitting and the bit of studying that I have done. And listening to teachers [who taught weekend programs]. I don't know if that has made a difference or not. I do somehow feel more spacious this semester and I don't know what would have made a difference there. I think in large part it just has to do with the quality of students I have this semester and also at the beginning of the semester."
Finally

Finally, I am happy to say that while sometimes it was hard to arrange meetings with Susan, she told me that she felt the interviews were like sitting for an hour. She felt refreshed and inspired in her practice. I greatly appreciated her generosity in finding time from what, as we have seen is a busy life, to meet with me, and am happy that the flexibility of the narrative approach enabled me to feel free to respond to her as a person and a fellow practitioner rather than only as a researcher involved in a study. In reviewing the interviews, it was apparent that often some of the most interesting material came from sections where we had focused on her practice and where I had shared my practice history and offered advice about her involvement. As she put it: “It’s like going to the center, like oh God, I can’t make it, oh this is it. Thank-you.”
Chapter Seven: Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the narratives from two approaches, bringing in my own experience as a practitioner and a teacher when it is relevant to the discussion. The first approach will be to examine in a detailed manner the most significant of the specific issues brought up by the teachers, including similarities and differences. The second approach will be to discuss the relationships among the various aspects of their lives such as their spiritual practice, livelihoods, contemplative disciplines and hobbies or pastimes.
Specifics

Beginnings

The first thing that becomes apparent in the narratives is that each of the teachers had some sort of early questioning or involvement in exploring the nature of mind before beginning to practice. Ron’s fascination with Dostoyevsky’s exploration of compassion, Susan’s broad exploration of yoga and other forms of body work, David’s early questioning about the pain he experienced and then his yoga and exploration of various psychotherapies, and Pierre’s primal scream therapy all represent this early quest for ways to work with their experience and sense that there was more to existence than was available in the milieus they were born into. I know that in my own case, I began to question my experience in my late teens as a result of having been bullied and of therefore recognizing that there must be some way to change how I related with my environment. At the same time, there are many practitioners I have met who did not go through that early questioning and exploring process, but rather became inspired to practice through meeting people who practiced and seeing that there were benefits to be had.

Without trying to build a theory that early forms of questioning of experience is a prerequisite for practice, or that it indicates that someone is necessarily fated to become interested in spirituality, it is interesting that this was a common experience among the four teachers. What can be said is that their interests and training prepared them to be able to connect with practice when they were ready or when they felt they needed to begin. In both Pierre and Susan’s cases, they had heard of Trungpa Rinpoche and had friends who were
practitioners who played pivotal roles in the early steps. In Ron’s case, seeing his ex-wife working with her emotional life inspired him to look into Buddhism and Shambhala training for answers to his questions, and in David’s case, he had met Trungpa Rinpoche and connected most powerfully through his books. In all cases, the books were significant in that even if there were still many preconceptions about what practice involved, there was some form of connection established.

A combination of serendipity and germination could describe the routes that lead to eventual meditation instruction and practice. This could also be said to lend credence to Susan’s belief that when she plants a seed for her students, “If they hear it once, they may hear it the second time when they need it or want to.” It also makes the point that there is no point in trying to force or convince someone to explore spirituality, as they will do it when they are ready and when their life situation brings them to the point where they feel the need or curiosity to look into it. Pierre, David and Susan all spoke of having experienced some form of resistance to involvement with Buddhism. David and Pierre felt they were not yet ready, even though they found something interesting about the teachers and the books, while Susan had been more interested in her yoga practice and other interests.

It is also significant that all four spoke of some kind of pain, be it existential, brought on by a death, or by running out of alternatives. Pierre once told me that he felt that he had had to hit “rock bottom” before he began to look for lasting answers to his problems, and that he felt that hitting rock bottom was a good basis - if a somewhat painful one - for people to start from. If there is a theme to draw from this similarity, it is that one source of interest in spirituality is from a dissatisfaction with one’s life and the desire to work with the pain rather than to give in to despair.
There were a range of reasons for each individual becoming a teacher. In his article on the ethical and spiritual genesis of teacher's interest in education, Mayes states that teachers are drawn to teaching for deeply ethical and spiritual reasons (Mayes, 1998). The teachers did not make that claim in the interviews, although the comments on teaching as a career suggested that they had developed such a relationship with the profession. David and Susan had both been interested in education from an early age, with David working as a camp councilor and Susan teaching everyone in her family anything that came to mind. Pierre had started later with his puppetry and teaching French in Louisiana, but had given up on teaching for a period due to his difficult experience in the South. Ron had turned to teaching as a profession he could quickly begin in order to support his new family. For both Ron and Susan, teaching was one of two options they considered; for Ron the alternative was becoming a librarian, and for Susan it was translating. Pierre did not consider other alternatives by the time he came to choose teaching. He had tried a range of alternatives and teaching seemed to be a way out of constant poverty and struggle.

One could hypothesize that the early questioning mentioned earlier experienced by all of the participants predisposed them to going into one of the helping professions, but that correlation is beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, none of the teachers were involved in Buddhism when they became teachers. Pierre was the closest as his beginning to practice and his entering teachers college happened at the same time, and he was clear that from the very beginning he felt that teaching was a good profession for a practitioner.
In fact, all of the teachers agreed that teaching was a good profession for a spiritual practitioner.

Both Pierre and David said that teaching is a great career for applying the Bodhisattva ideals from the Mahayana, and the Shambhala vision of creating enlightened society, and all of their observations on the influence of their overall involvement in the Dharma were made in that context. David specifically said that he felt blessed that he was able to have a job where he had daily opportunities to put into practice the teachings and the practices such as tonglen. He also said that he needed to feel that his “... job is doing something that helps...” He added that he appreciated “being out in the front lines, you know, I think that’s one of the reasons I chose behavioural. It’s as front lines as you can get.”

According to David, teaching is also a profession that demands “just sort of being on the spot, being forced to be on the spot...” This quality of being in the moment or “on the spot” was also mentioned by Susan who spoke of teaching as a profession where you have to be “absolutely right there,” a condition which can also be used to describe the state of being, developed through meditation. Ron brought up the same issue when he said that practice helped him to come back to the “present moment,” which he mentioned many times as being very helpful, and in his mind even essential for good teaching. He was clear that coming back to the present moment from day dreams and discursiveness was something that is developed “not just when you are sitting but an awareness while you are walking, while you are working or in the classroom, and all of a sudden you recognize something and you say wow, and it brings you right back to where you are, to the present.”

Ron also spoke of his appreciation for the love he was able to give and receive from the students and how that exchange could transform any negativity
he was experiencing at the beginning of the day into a feeling of satisfaction by the end of the day. At one point during the interviews, David spoke of how he came to love his students. He told me that there was one student in all of his years of teaching with whom he had taken most of the year to come to love. Eventually it was through the very pain that was at the root of the boy’s behaviour that David was able to come to love him.

This quality of love that manifested in David and Ron’s teaching reflects Parker Palmer’s “loving relatedness” that is central to his vision of a spiritual education. Palmer contrasts the way of knowing based in curiosity and control with one that is based in compassion and love (Palmer, 1993). Knowing based in compassion and love involves knowing others and entering into their worlds, just as David entered into his student’s world of vampires and toilets in order to know him. Susan and Pierre did not speak of love during their interviews, an omission that also speaks of the diversity of approaches to spirituality. However, Susan obviously cared deeply for her students, and would speak of them very fondly with obvious affection, and Pierre spoke of the role of compassion in his teaching and in his practice.

Another way in which teaching is a good career for practitioners is the flexibility during the summer holidays to go on retreats. This was only an issue for Pierre and David who both mentioned it as a benefit. Retreat practice will also be discussed later in the chapter, but for now it is worth noting that retreats are a major step in connecting with the practice. While on the subject of practice and teaching, the rhythm and events of the teaching day provide opportunities to practice tonglen and raising windhorse. The segmented rhythm of the teaching day provides opportunities to raise windhorse, and both Ron and Pierre spoke of doing that practice just before they went into a class. In my teaching, that is also the moment I most often remember to raise windhorse. I can feel the
difference when I enter a class having raised windhorse as my posture is erect and I feel myself open and extended toward my students.

David, Pierre and Ron said that there were times when they needed to cut through their anger or frustration. For Pierre and David, tonglen was the practice they used most often, while for Ron, the phrase “it just doesn’t matter” was very useful. Teaching is a profession where provocative situations are plentiful. Usually venting anger is not the most effective way to work with such situations. Ron felt that it can often push a student further away and make effective communication even harder to establish. Working in a situation where the apparent futility of anger or frustration as a means of addressing situations is so clear, and where the power imbalance between teacher and student makes this an even more important point, helps spur a practitioner to use tonglen or some other means of evoking in the moment the spaciousness and loving, compassionate presence that Parker Palmer spoke of, and which is developed through practice.

The point of seeing the difficult emotional situations during teaching as opportunities to connect with one’s practice is a point that is made more generally in meditation instruction. Meditation is not an escape from the turbulence of mental events, but rather a way of becoming very mindful of the minutia and texture of the events. One of the early experiences of meditation is that the mind does not stop producing thoughts, but rather that every experience one has is replayed over and over, while in the longer term there does tend to be a calming and a familiarity that develops. At the same time, as one deepens one’s practice, the very intensity and sharpness of the more turbulent and painful thoughts and emotions can wake one up from the discursive wandering, bringing one back to the moment and to the breath. In a teaching situation, this would be a return to the situation without the feeling of
being trapped in the storyline of the emotional reaction. In this way, even extremely difficult emotions can be welcomed not only on the cushion, but in post-meditation, as over time the habit of letting go of storylines and the associated emotions, and being able to be present without being judgmental, replaces the habit of reinforcing the emotions. This is bolstered by the recognition that often the emotional response has less to do with others than with the constructed storyline that we generate. From this mixture of path and fruition of practice - using negative emotions as an opportunity to return to the moment - one is able to then relate with the situation at hand and come up with responses that enable both the situation and individuals to be more productive and less alienating.

Rather than something particularly ground breaking, the above description is hopefully something that any teacher might recognize as a useful approach to the daily challenges of teaching, and one which they may even already apply to some extend in such situations. What Buddhism and the Shambhala tradition provide are practices and a philosophical framework where the understanding is fine tuned and understood as the most practical response.

Finally, most of the issues that will be spoken of below happened within the context of teaching. In itself, this demonstrates that teaching is a profession where there are ample opportunities to apply one’s practice. This point also serves to illustrate the complexity of Miller’s transformation mode of education (Miller, 1988; Miller, Cassie and Drake, 1990). When an interaction with a student provokes strong negative emotional responses, it is doubtful that the student is consciously trying to teach the teacher something, or if they are, the lesson they have in mind might not be one that would be considered uplifting. That said, sometimes students do make points that evoke negative emotional responses, but which are actually quite powerful and insightful. Whatever the intention,
when seen as opportunities to apply the view and practices as discussed above, from the perspective of a transformational approach to education they are an aspect of the fluidity of the roles of teacher and learner and as such to be valued and appreciated.

Expectations, no Guarantees and Changing Visions

Expectations about the effects of practice were present in a number of forms. Susan was very straightforward about her early hopes for serenity and for working with the sadness after her dog's death, and also spoke of her surprise when she flared up at the students playing loud music in the hallway at school. She also made the comment that many people beginning practice are "seeking some kind of peace, or joy - maybe a high." Ron expressed a form of expectation when he left Karme Choling saying: "...what's the use of this practice if it doesn't help me to deal with something like that? [the problem with his car and passport]", even though he knew "...that's not the purpose of the practice..." Pierre came to the Shambhala center in Vancouver with the expectation that he would be able to work with his depression, and David felt that he had tried every other possible way to work with his problems before turning to Buddhism.

Susan said that at the first public talk she attended at the Shambhala center in Toronto, the speaker had stressed that one should not have expectations about the fruition of one's practice. At the same time, it is quite reasonable and natural to have expectations when beginning such an endeavour. If there were no expectations, why would anyone be interested in the first place? One might also add that Pierre and David had the expectation that they would find ways to work with their pain, an expectation that was borne out. In my mind, the point
the teacher made about no expectations is not so much a ban on them, but an acknowledgment that initial expectations often change as one becomes familiar with the practices, and that if one doesn’t accept the changes, then problems can arise. A similar comment is made by Kornfield in Miller’s “Contemplative Practitioner”. In the book, Miller quotes Kornfield as saying: “Through meditation we can rediscover love, oneness and freedom. Many people meditate for other reasons - for example, to deal with pain and to understand suffering. However, if one practices with an open heart and mind, meditation eventually leads to oneness, a deep connectedness.” (Miller, 1994). Although Kornfield’s terminology is different, the same movement from initial motivations to a broader sense of the possible fruition of practice is made.

Furthermore, expectations, if kept in mind during one’s formal practice, are just another layer of thought. Seen in this way, they should be related with just as any other thought: by being acknowledged and then allowed to dissolve. The other side of this issue is that if one feels guilty or is hard on oneself for having expectations, that can manifest as a form of self-aggression which runs counter to Pema Chodron’s advice to be as gentle with oneself as possible (Chodron, 1999). This advice is not simply an aesthetic consideration, but a practical recommendation, as guilt and other forms of self-aggression only add to the turbulence of thoughts.

The advice is particularly important for new practitioners, as a common experience for new meditators is that when they begin to meditate, they feel that their level of internal discursiveness is even more pronounced than usual. Miller identified this as the first theme in his section describing the new practitioners in his class at OISE. Many of them had difficulty relaxing with their practice and spent the early practice sessions struggling with their minds (Miller, 1994). This is partly due to their never having related to their minds in such a focused manner.
before, and thus not really knowing just how much goes on in their minds while they are engaged in daily activities that tend to obscure the constant, virtually seamless flow of emotions and thoughts. This can be disconcerting and give rise to feelings of initial inadequacy and frustration which can further intensify the experience and generate even more mental activity, rather than the expected calm equanimity. Any respite from this can be seen as a major breakthrough in their practice, and when the turbulence returns, the lost moment of tranquillity can be sorely missed.

All of the teachers acknowledged that there were no specific guarantees as to what kinds of effects practice would have. However, as already discussed, there were effects that each of the teachers spoke of. The issue is more of the changes that occur in the nature of the expectations as their practice developed. There were certain general categories of effects that involvement with the Dharma evoked in the teachers. However, these effects were not completely uniform. One important point that Pierre and David made was that it was not about avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. In many ways, their narratives were replete with descriptions of how their practice had brought them closer to both pain and pleasure. David spoke of feeling the world much more directly in all its aspects. He described being more “vulnerable” and having an “open heart” and made the analogy of having a smile with a tear in the eye. Pierre spoke of his retreats which he was careful to present as not being some kind of idyllic experience where he relaxed into the silence and serenity of being alone. Rather, he said that he found retreat practice to be very challenging, to the point of provoking some fear in the period leading up to the retreat. He also described the first few days as being “neurotic” and “crazy”.

Ron also spoke of how practice did not make problems go away. He told me that “I mean it doesn’t make everything rosy of course because you still feel
that there is something wrong, but just by identifying them it helps ... You are able to deal with them a lot better. Sometimes they do go away. I mean sometimes they definitely do go away and practice helps that. But there are times when no, they don’t go away, they still stick around and they still bother you and they still - a bad itch - still there. Just being able to sometimes say yeah, I got an itch.” In the same vein, Pierre said that “Sometimes I will still snap. Well snap is a hard word, it’s not the right word, I will still you know, be quite, shut it up.” The key ability for working with the ongoing arising of irritations and other mental phenomena was in his opinion “...to respond but in a way that the kid doesn’t have anything to grab on.” David also made the same point in his description of meditation when he said that “maybe the problems go away, maybe they don’t.” What he added, and what the others echoed in various ways, was that you become familiar with yourself, or in other words, you come to know yourself. This knowing is at the heart of the connection between practice and teaching.
Effects and Attributes

There is no particular order to the various effects and attributes that the teachers spoke of. Some of them were mentioned by most or all of the teachers, and some only by one individual. Simply because one of the teachers might not have mentioned a particular effect, does not mean that they did not have that quality. This is especially true given my approach to the research. I avoided having a check list of questions such as “do you find that your confidence has grown through your involvement with practice?”, as I did not want to be that suggestive. Instead, as I discussed in the introduction and the methodology chapter, I tried to ask broad, open ended questions that left it up to the teachers to be specific when they chose and to what degree they chose. In this section, I will present what the teachers specifically identified as areas of change and development without projecting my own sense of who they are and how they feel. However, I will develop some of the issues and specifics, drawing on my own experience in order to explain the significance of the teachers’ observations.

Confidence and Vulnerability

As confidence has already been introduced as a topic, let us now turn to that attribute. All of the teachers are experienced professionals and from the way they spoke of their teaching, as well as from the observations I carried out, it was obvious that they were confident about their professional skills. Ron and David both spoke of how they experienced a connection between their practice and a growth in their sense of confidence. For Ron, there were two areas which are relevant. Ron spoke briefly but quite clearly of being inspired through talks
given during the Shambhala weekend programs to take more challenges in his life such as taking courses at university and being involved in curriculum development projects. More significantly, he identified the self-awareness and self-assessment processes as having benefited from his practice. According to Ron, from the process of watching the mind in shamatha, he was better able to observe his mind and assess his teaching. From this familiarity, he said that he had also become more trusting of his teaching and his general work in the classroom. The development of self-confidence and trust that came from a fine tuned ability to self-assess is a process that Ron felt all teachers needed to develop and in fact, to some extent did develop. Those that had difficulties in this area were the teachers who Ron said had discipline problems and students frequently sent to the office. The point here is that Ron saw his practice as benefiting a process that is an essential part of the training and enculturation of any teacher.

David spoke of confidence in a number of areas. He was quite confident of his ability to recognize that he was overwhelmed in his work, and that any teacher would be overwhelmed in the situation. His attitude was summed up in his comment that “Yeah, I’m going to work with my mind and with their minds as best I can until I find it unworkable.” His feelings of frustration did not undermine his fundamental assessment of himself as a good behavioural teacher. He also manifested confidence in how he talked about his relationships with his students. One of the ways he did this was in his comment that he found that the best way he could work with the students was to “just try and be me.” He further developed this attitude saying: “I just find in the course of the day, you know, relating to children or adults that there’s some quality of this is it, this is who I am, this is what I have to offer. I don’t know if it’s right or wrong ... I’m
gonna step in with what I have to offer ... in my dealings with principal or vice principal, other students, I just present me...

He said that the willingness to trust himself “definitely feels Buddhist.” He felt that he had become “...less afraid of who I am somehow. Or in the Shambhalian sense, not afraid of who you are.” A prime example of the trust was the example of relating to the boy who would only talk about toilets and vampires. As he said, he was willing to “dive into the water with him and hang out in toilet land or wherever it is just to explore it with him. I guess that’s, there’s some sense of trust there you know.” He also felt that what might be called a “Buddhist therapeutic thing to do” was to “just sort of trust them where they are and just hang out with them.”

Closely related to confidence is vulnerability. Being willing to make oneself vulnerable depends on trusting that the results will not be catastrophic or overwhelmingly painful. The “autism” or closing down of communion with the world that Berry and Sullivan speak of is a manifestation of the lack of such confidence to be vulnerable (Berry and Sullivan, 1999). David said that being vulnerable was one of the essential things he provided for his students. He said that when he was able, if a student did something that caused him pain that “sometimes I just get hurt, which is the most genuine reaction. With most of them, they miss that.” Pierre also spoke of vulnerability. His description of an approach to communication and to teaching in which “you allow anything that comes up to come up without pushing it down.” was based on a willingness to be “hurt” or “wounded.”

**Working with Emotions**
Working with emotions is one of the cornerstones of meditation, and a major area of focus for all of the teachers. Therefore, this section is the largest of the specific areas that will be discussed. For Susan, her initial interest in practice was to find a way to work with the emotions she was experiencing as a result of her dog's death. We also spent some time in the interviews discussing the event in the hallway where she had lost her temper with the students, although we did not talk about working with emotions in any other situations. However, the other teachers focused on the topic to a greater extent. Ron said that practice had helped him to work with his temper and frustration in the classroom. He said that he finds himself "in fits of anger or moments of frustration, just being able to bring myself back to the reality and sort of trying to connect with the student on a more personal level rather than just trying to deal with my frustrations, trying to let go of my frustrations, being able to just look within myself and also recognize the background of the student as well before exploding."

David talked about a number of emotional issues that he worked with and in which he felt practice had been beneficial. One of the main ones was the frustration that he experienced as an overwhelmed behavioural teacher. He described the importance of the "fresh start" he could experience through flashing tonglen and connecting with what he called the "practice mind." He also said that this experience of "cutting through" intense emotional situations was essential as the students inevitably found ways to trigger his anger, and it would not be productive to let that anger control his actions.

The Shambhala teachings on basic goodness were also influential for David, as he felt he had come to be able to relate to the students' basic goodness, not only as a pedagogical approach which differed from the usual focus on the students' weaknesses, but also as it helped him to see "through the bullshit" and understand the pain that was causing whatever actions might otherwise have
angered him. That said, it is also important to remember that as a result of the significance of maintaining an open and vulnerable heart, working with emotions does not imply not feeling them. Rather, it is about being more open to one’s own experience, painful as it may be, as well as that of others, and then working with that situation. Ron also made this point when he said that he used to “…let them [negative emotions] build up and then explode. In the last year I’ve been able to accept things and just sort of, I will be able to talk about them a lot more freely then I ever have in the past.”

Pierre brought in the aspect of the role of the storyline through which the emotional reaction is able to continue. He said that “…you stop going along with it, with that storyline of being irritated, whatever irritated you.” He described the development of this approach from formal meditation practice to application in the classroom in the following passage:

[in formal practice] There’s nobody around to irritate you but irritation is still coming. But then after lots of meditation, I think, you go out, for example teaching; and I think teaching is a very good situation for that. Then you realize that the same thing happens. But I don’t know if that makes sense. But the thing is, by developing some space, some awareness, some maitri, you allow on your cushion these things to arise … You let them arise. So eventually you do the same thing with others. And in a teaching situation, because you always with people, whether it’s kids or other teachers or your principal, you do the same thing. So you allow them to irritate you in some ways. You don’t snap back because the kids are not listening or it’s making a joke or whatever he or she does. So, in terms of others, in terms of relating with others, that’s very helpful. Because that allows them space to do whatever they do.
Pierre described the situation with the disruptive boy during the orientation as one in which he applied "maitri" or kindness to himself and to the boy. Rather than just suppressing the irritation, he allowed himself to experience the emotion before letting it dissolve. While meditating, one doesn't suppress the emotions, but gives them the space to manifest and then dissolve. If one approached emotions with the intent to crush them, or in some way keep them at bay, the effect, as anyone who has meditated can attest, is that they grow stronger and more pervasive as one puts more energy into suppressing them. This process further builds on the motivation for suppression which is usually the desire to avoid painful experiences and promote pleasurable ones. With the spaciousness that comes from sitting still and following the breath in shamatha/vipashyana, these motivations and habitual patterns become clearly apparent. Another tendency that can arise from an attempt to suppress or ignore is that of feeling bad that such feelings even occur, as if the presence of negative emotions are in some way a reflection of being unworthy or bad. Through not judging the mental phenomena, but simply touching it and then returning to the breath, this self-critical tendency also loses some of its solidity, further promoting the sense of spaciousness and gentleness, and the resultant ability to respond creatively and spontaneously to situations as they arise.

Another aspect of working with emotions is the sense of guilt or regret expressed by Susan and Ron and briefly mentioned above about not practicing as much as they wanted to. David and Pierre both said that there were areas of their practice that they wanted to improve, such as Pierre's interest in doing more of the windhorse practice and David's desire to do more vajrayogini. The difference is that after many years of practice, they had a sense of confidence in their aspiration to practice more and apply the shorter practices. And as in the case of David's finishing his ngondro after 10 years, they had had the time to see
that this sense of aspiration actually bore fruit. In Pierre’s case, he has come to use tonglen more in classroom situations and remembers how his aspiration to carry-out that practice, and an approach of not criticizing himself when he forgot about the practice, were instrumental in actually being able to bring the practice into his life. For the newer practitioners there was more of a sense of regret and sometimes of guilt at having these useful tools and not using them to their potential.

My own use of the lungta practice, just as my daily practice of meditation, is cyclical rather than steady, and while I aspire to practice more, I recognize that usually giving myself a hard time about not practicing has not been helpful in actually sitting on the cushion for formal practice, nor in remembering to use shorter practices such as raising lungta. Rather, I see it as a long term process of bringing myself to a more regular practice and of remembering to apply the shorter practices whenever possible. In Pierre’s words: “Well I wish I could do it more, but at the same time I look at it as, well I’m being more, getting more aware of it and eventually I’ll do it.”

Pierre and David spoke more in terms of the ways that practice helped them live their lives. They recognized that they didn’t necessarily practice as much as they could, but that they had a regularity to their practice and understood that in a life with family and career, there were times when practice had to be balanced with other responsibilities and interests. Furthermore, they were well grounded in their practices and confident of their commitment and the overall regularity of their practice without adding a negative storyline when their practice flagged. At the same time, Pierre did speak of how it was harder to ignore situations in which he chose not to apply the practices, or situations in which he acted in ways that were not compassionate. He spoke of these situations as moments in which he was frivolous or lazy, but did not dwell on
them overly. There was even a sense of reinforcement of his practice, in that not being able to ignore those moments reminded him of the awareness that practice develops, thereby making it harder for things to slip by unnoticed.

In my experience of both my own practice history and that of others I have spoken with over the years, guilt and negative reinforcement, while sometimes being a short term spur to practice, in the long term is a debilitating experience that undermines the very goal it seeks to promote. Letting go of that guilt and the associated storylines, and connecting with a more joyful appreciation of practice brings both added energy and enthusiasm as well as a deepening of the quality of the practice and aid in extending the Mahayana ideal of compassion and gentleness to others.

Space, Maitri and Gentleness

From Pierre’s description in the middle of the last section of allowing emotions to arise in order to work with them, the importance of space becomes apparent. The development of a sense of spaciousness comes about through the practice. While in the short term there may be no guarantees, Ron, Pierre and David all mentioned some aspect of what might be called space or a spacious relationship with mind. From seeing your thoughts and habitual patterns arising over and over again as a number of the teachers described, there is the gradual development of compassion for one’s condition and the ability to extend that compassion to others. Space in this sense is also significant in that as discussed in chapter three, it is one of the most common attributes of spiritual practice. It is closely related to ‘maitri’ or loving kindness and gentleness. Pierre made the connection with meditation when he said that if he doesn’t practice for a period of time - such as when he had the house guest - he gets “out of shape” and feels
“speedy” which is the antithesis of spacious. He also said that in this condition he
gets “neurotic” and is more easily irritated. He contrasted this with periods when
he is practicing regularly and is able to develop “...that space where things can
come up without being put off by them.” At school, the effect is to “be open to
whatever happens within the lesson I’m teaching, within whatever activity I’m
doing with the kids.”

David further developed the connection between practice, space and
gentleness, saying that there is a “kind of gentleness toward yourself that starts
to grow out of your sitting practice ... I’m definitely more gentle with myself and
others, and I definitely connect it with my practice.” The apparent calmness that
people remark on after sitting periods, and which people have even sometimes
seen in me after a retreat, is a manifestation of the spacious relationship with
one’s mind, and the maitri that develops from the many hours of watching the
same mental videos over and over.

Ron was more reserved in ascribing too direct of a connection to practice.
He said that “This might be my practice, it might be not be, it’s hard to say, but it
might just be experience. I have become in the last two or three years a much
calmer teacher and a lot less likely to use a loud voice or anger to control my
students. I find it much easier to do so in a much calmer, quiet manner and I
believe the practice has something to do with that and I also believe experience
has something to do it as well.”

Community and Sangha, Teachers and Gurus

The sangha is the last topic to be discussed in this section. Community in
general is an important element in most spiritual paths. Speaking from a
Christian perspective, Gatto also stressed the importance of the congregation
(Gatto, 1998). He spoke of the radical freedom and individuality of the early congregationalism in the New England colonies and how the bonds of community were built on strong local ties of family and friendship, and were not universalist (Gatto, 1998). While a Buddhist approach would include the importance of a universal sense of responsibility, there is no substitute for the strong ties of family and friendship as a training ground for a broader application of spirituality in life. One of the marks of the teachers who were more committed to the sangha was that they had such ties, while the newer practitioners were unsure to what extent they wanted to develop that level of communion with the sangha.

Not only is the support of the community important for one’s practice - David said that he would find it difficult to practice regularly without the support of the community - it also serves a number of other functions that will be discussed in this section. It was mentioned by all of the participants as a significant area of their involvement with Buddhism and/or Shambhala training. All of the teachers expressed some degree of appreciation for the sangha, while there were also reservations expressed by the two newer practitioners.

Ron expressed his reservations quite clearly about membership in the sangha. He was hesitant about having to adopt a philosophy that he did not believe that included beliefs such as reincarnation, and he had mentioned that commitment was something that he had always had difficulty with. He also felt that perhaps the sangha was too “internalized, that a lot of it is to deal with let’s see how we can make Shambhala work and perhaps it’s a little bit too much tunnel vision.” At the same time, he appreciated the community and said that the “...people who are there are wonderful people. I mean and you can see the effect that practice has, although I didn’t know them before that. But everybody seems to be very caring and, and very hospitable and very open.” Ron also talked
about his ongoing involvement with other communities. He spoke of visiting Christian churches and how his desire to continue exploring other avenues of spiritual development was a factor in his reservations about membership in the sangha.

Susan also had reservations about membership in the sangha. She said that she “…already has family and that’s my community and so I feel guilty because I really appreciate all the work that you guys do to keep the center going.” She also expressed her mixed feelings about the founder of the sangha, Trungpa Rinpoche. Along with the appreciation for the work done was a sense of trust as she recognized “a decency in the people and a sincerity that they are all on the path.” She added that she didn’t feel “…an element of hucksterism or, or trying to drag anyone through or into anything. It’s just people wanting to share and that’s nice. People really putting a lot of energy into it too, I mean people who do, who keep the centre going in all the different ways. I appreciate it.”

A central aspect of sangha is the role and relationship with the teacher, or in the case of Tibetan, Vajrayana Buddhism, the guru. For David and Pierre, their relationship with the man they considered to be their guru - Trungpa Rinpoche - was central to their experience of their paths. Pierre said that one of his experiences during his stay in Fort MacMurray was the feeling of longing to meet Trungpa Rinpoche, and David spoke of how his practices helped him to connect with his guru.

All of the teachers expressed their appreciation for books such as “Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism” (Trungpa, 1973). For the newer practitioners, the books and the Buddhist perspective presented in them helped them to build a world view that synchronized their previous studies, while the more experienced practitioners spoke of the books as having had a more profound influence. David said that he was haunted by the books and the sense that Trungpa
Rinpoche was somehow “able to see into his mind,” and Pierre said that it was through the books that the aforementioned feeling of longing was developed. David also said that one of the reasons the sangha was such a powerful presence in his life was due to Trungpa Rinpoche’s brilliance in creating such a complex and rich mini-society with which to practice.

As discussed in chapter four, an important aspect of the Vajrayana sadhanas is the relationship with the guru, and devotion is an essential element in the practices. Also mentioned was that one of the major difficulties in bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the West is the question of how to relate to the guru and to devotion, and that even within the Buddhist community there is controversy about the applicability of this form of relationship for Westerners.

I still do not feel that it is possible to resolve the issue, other than to say that there are people for whom the guru is a central aspect of their spiritual path, and others for whom the presence of the guru is an obstacle. Within the Shambhala sangha, the Shambhala tradition has the aspiration to provide a sufficiently secular path that people who are not interested in developing a relationship with the guru can practice and be involved in the community without feeling pressured. Furthermore, there is an openness to the wisdom of other traditions, so much so that members of other religions such as the Rabbi who held the Seder at the retreat, feel free to practice with the community and even become members. This spirit of ecumenism is a clear example of a pluralist position such as Eck proposed (Eck, 1993). It combines the respect that she demands for other traditions, while also providing a way for people to explore Buddhist meditative practices without having to abandon their faith.

That said, I have known people who chose not to continue their involvement with Shambhala training because there was still too much emphasis on the role and presence of Trungpa Rinpoche or the Sakyong. As the sangha is
still relatively young - having started in the seventies - this issue is still in a process of evolution. However, for someone interested in practicing Vajrayana Buddhism, the guru relationship becomes essential. This distinction is clear in the different ways that the newer practitioners who are only involved with Shambhala training, and the more experienced practitioners who practice the Vajrayana, spoke of the guru and their relationship with the sangha.

Another reason for mentioning the reservations felt by Susan and Ron is to outline experiences that many people go through in the initial years of their involvement with a spiritual community. Many Buddhist teachers recommend taking one’s time and becoming familiar with a community, the teacher or guru, the practices, and the forms and traditions, before becoming a member. In the end it is up to the individual as to whether they want to join the community, and in the case of my sangha, people often finish the first five Shambhala levels and then choose to not go any further, satisfied with their practice and sometimes reticent to become involved in the community aspects of being a member.

While there is a desire to attract more members, there is no sense that people have to continue, or that people should become members. Rather, the Shambhala training cycles are presented as a secular offering to anyone who wants to learn how to meditate with no need for any commitment unless they want to engage with further study and practices, and meditation instruction on the open house nights are provided free of charge. There are many people who come regularly to these evening and never become members or involve themselves with any other activity in the community. On the other hand, for David and Pierre, as for me, the sangha is an integral part of our lives, and for all of us, there are the strong human bonds that Gatto spoke of (Gatto, 1998); in their cases marriage as well as friends, and in my case, in addition to sangha
friends, my girlfriend is a sangha member. David and Pierre made it clear that the sangha was seen as an integral part of their spiritual paths.

Although Pierre did not speak about the sangha very much in the interviews, his history in the beginning of the narrative demonstrates how important sangha is to him. His major concern about moving to Fort McMurray was the loss of the support of the sangha, and one of the two main reasons he moved to Toronto was to be with sangha. His actions also speak quite loudly; as I mentioned, he has carried out a number of roles in the community and he and his wife have also hosted many visiting teachers and fellow sangha members over the years.

David spent more time discussing sangha. As the person in charge of taking care of membership issues on the executive council at the center, David had contemplated the question of the sangha for some time. He saw the sangha as being a part of his practice, in both his ability to extend his Buddhist practice from the Hinayana level of working with his own mind to the Mahayana level of working with all sentient beings, and in his engagement with the Shambhala teachings on creating enlightened society. The following passage expresses this combination:

I think what I really appreciate about the Sangha is the fact that basically it’s made up of a whole bunch of people, some of whom I’d be friends with, and some of whom I wouldn’t, which is sort of the whole point. That somehow, you know, if we’re going to create any kind of enlightened world, and at some point in your practice you start to see that that’s a possibility, that if I can enlighten myself, that I, if I can at all help other’s enlightenment, maybe there’s a possibility there that our whole world could be less confused.
He felt that the Shambhala sangha was unique among North American sanghas in that the founder, Trungpa Rinpoche, had “created a particular environment ... a microcosm for what’s going on in the world.” The forms and internal structures such as “a hierarchy, teachers, people to clean the centers, people to provide security, and people to run the legal and financial aspects.” mirrored the larger society and provided people with the opportunity to put their meditation and teachings into practice. He also said that the sangha was unique in its stress on helping students develop into teachers themselves.

However, he did feel that there were some problems in the sangha, and said that our sangha “had a lot to learn from the Christian community or the Jewish community that are very welcoming and see that as their practice, as opposed to particular individual practice that we do.” He wanted to see more of a Mahayana emphasis develop in the sangha, much as Ron had wanted the sangha to look outside of its boundaries and try to take more of a role in the larger community.

Celebrating more with each other and also being more hospitable and more outward looking were the changes David wanted to see happen in the community. He told me that his own “sense of community at this point is bigger than the Shambhala center and the members, and what interests me is the greater community ... I could be in my school, my neighbourhood or the people who come to an open house.”

Differences and Similarities

I hope the above sections have illustrated the points that there are many reasons to engage in spiritual practice, and that each individual will then find different benefits, as well as certain similar ones. To make the point, I would like
to return to the section on confidence. Each of the teachers spoke of confidence as being something that they felt their practice influenced. However, they spoke of different areas of effect, or different ways their confidence was effected. For Ron, the willingness to accept challenges and the ability to self-assess was the main area. For David trusting his pedagogical approach and having the confidence to just be himself were the two main areas, while he also shared with Pierre the willingness to be vulnerable.

In the same way, the sangha played a different role for each of the teachers. David's path is closely linked with the sangha and his exploration of what sangha meant to him. For Pierre, sangha was important, but his main interest was with having a daily practice. David said that his formal practice took a back seat to his human relationships some times, and that he felt this was entirely in keeping with his understanding of the teaching and his guru's intentions. For Ron and Susan, the sangha was still a source of questions, but also a group of people who helped them to practice through hosting programs and by simply being good examples of practitioners. Similarities and differences exist among the teachers without any of them having to be considered as holding a wrong view on the matter. The acceptance of this kind of diversity is in my opinion, an integral aspect of a spiritual path and a spiritual community.
Umbrella

The final issue to be addressed is the relationship of the various aspects of the teachers' lives, such as their spiritual practice, livelihoods, contemplative disciplines and hobbies or pastimes. This issue is also related to the comments made by Ron and David about teachers creating wonderful, and in the broad sense of the word - spiritual - environments in their classrooms, while sometimes having difficulties developing the same qualities in their lives outside the classroom. As such, spirituality can serve as support for characteristics and ways of being that are necessary and helpful in teaching, and also serve to help extend the spiritual path quality of teaching into the rest of one's life.

A Concern

From personal experience, this issue can be a delicate one. While I was writing this thesis, I spoke with a colleague at OISE about it. The colleague was an old friend and a respected and successful academic and teacher. Her response was that she had problems with the proposition that a teacher who did not practice meditation might not have the same abilities as any other teacher, practitioner or otherwise. This encounter alerted me to the possibility that other teachers might resent the implication of limitations, or of special abilities associated with meditation.

I am not claiming that simply by being involved in a spiritual path such as Buddhism, a teacher will be able to develop special abilities. An analogy may serve to clarify my position on this matter. If someone practices a sport, there is the development of certain abilities according to a combination of natural affinity.
for athletics and the seriousness with which they apply themselves to their training. In a similar manner, if one studies a discipline, and if there is sufficient effort, some degree of expertise will most likely develop. In the case of Buddhism and Shambhala training, the discipline is working with the mind and the development of attributes such as those discussed above. It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that some degree of insight into the nature of mind, and thereby some ability to work with the mind may accrue through the practice. It is not, however, a certainty, nor will the effects be uniform, as shown by the diversity of responses given by the teachers in this thesis.

The analogy is not perfect, in that meditation, as a number of the teachers mentioned, is not about adding elements to one’s personality, but rather is based on the premise that clearing away confusion and allowing the discursive mental processes to slow down, allows qualities such as compassion to arise naturally. However, for the purposes of illustrating the basic point, the analogy will do. The analogy’s limitation also serves to point out why what might be called the ‘attributes of a spiritual practitioner’ can be developed in people who have no interest in spirituality - they exist in everyone at least as latent possibilities, and many people do not need the practices to develop them. In essence, the question boils down to one of to what extent you give credence to what is presented in this thesis. And as I stated in the introduction, my intention is not to convince you that I am right, but rather to present something for you to contemplate and then take up as you will and in your own way.

To further illustrate the point that I do not see Buddhism, Shambhala training or any other spiritual path as having a patent on the development of the characteristics I have discussed, I would like to return to Pierre’s example of the new principal that came to his school. He described her as a “spiritual person,” and mentioned the characteristics such as: "mindful and tender with lots of
softness, very vajra, very precise." Pierre was not aware of her involvement in a spiritual path, and yet she embodied characteristics that inspired him. The implication is that Pierre accepted that they were characteristics that anyone could have, and for which there are as many ways of developing as there are people. A good family with strong values, the recognition that bringing these values and attributes into one’s life creates further joy and satisfaction - both of these as well as other sources could, and in the case of the principal, may have given rise to them without the aid of any religious system or overt, self-described spiritual path.

This is exactly my point. Spiritual paths and disciplines such as meditation serve to help one to connect with these characteristics and provide time tested means for examining in detail their effects so that one’s aspiration is bolstered by a practical and down-to-earth understanding of why they are worth infusing one’s life with. It is perhaps more significant to consider that the ability to develop these characteristics in oneself and the degree to which they manifest in one’s fellow practitioners, is a way to assess the integrity of a spiritual path and to chose what kind of tradition or which methods within the tradition one wants to practice. As Pierre observed at another point in the interviews, many if not most of the teachers seem to be doing excellent work in the classroom without being a part of any spiritual tradition.

Teaching as Path

Having made the point that spiritual paths do not have a monopoly on personal growth and the development of insight, I would now like to return to
the discussion of what some of the teachers said was unique about their spiritual paths.

All of the teachers expressed their respect for their colleagues and said that the vast majority of teachers were dedicated professionals who did a good job. For example, David said that “In school, people seem to be able to put on a professional front sometimes. It’s very effective. And a lot of teachers are excellent teachers.” Pierre gave the example of the principal and Ron expressed his respect for all of the teachers at his school. There are many possible reasons why teachers do a good job in their classrooms. Dedication to the students, a sense of professionalism, peer responsibility, good training and in-service mentoring such as that described by Ron, are just a few possible ones. There may also be more personal reasons, or what Lortie, writing on teacher motivation, called “psychic rewards” (Lortie, 1975) such as a sense of satisfaction, the shared affection with the students and a vision of teaching as a calling that bears the responsibility of educating the youth.

The list above points to an aspect of the profession of teaching that in my assessment is significant. Teaching provides training and an environment which fosters the development of what were discussed earlier in the chapter as the effects of spiritual practice. This is one of the reasons that teaching was seen as a good profession for a practitioner. In a group interview, David spoke of how some teachers “floored him” with their excellence. He said that they were able to “walk in the doors, to just, they just flip themselves. It’s like they raise Lungta, they walk in the door, the way they dress, the way they carry themselves, the way they relate with kids in the hall.”

As he reported in his narrative, he found the difference was outside the classroom. “Outside of school most people’s lives are crazy. And when I talk to them, that’s when I realize, well something’s happened in my life, because you
know, it's not that bad at all. I actually like who I live with - I like my wife. And I find the level of conversation sometimes when people talk about their spouses or about their illness, just what's going on in their lives, it makes me crazy ... it makes me sad when I realize that a lot of people's lives are falling apart. So that's when I realize something's happening.” Ron echoed this comment when he said that “In the staffroom you often hear more complaints about teachers' personal lives than you do about their classroom and what's happening in their classroom. That's interesting and I really recognized that as being an aspect of it. I mean even on the complaining level, they can't take what they are doing in the classroom outside the classroom and apply it to their lives. And there are lot of teachers who have very difficult lives.”

**Integrating, Extending and the Continuum**

There are two issues that arise from the above observation. The first is that there is something about teaching that evokes states of mind and ways of relating that resonate with spiritual practice. An aspect of this point was made clearly by Ron when he was talking about awareness and self-assessment in teaching and in his practice. Speaking of the experience of returning to the moment, he said that “It seems that when you are teaching there is no moment there, well maybe there is but you don’t recognize the moment as much as you do with your sitting practice.” In this light, practice is a kind of distilled experience of the same process of awareness and coming back to the moment, or “being on the spot” that Susan and David also mentioned as being a constant experience in teaching and in formal practice.

In the group interview there was a long discussion of the issue of teaching having somewhat unique spiritual possibilities. David had originally felt that in
all of the helping professions there was the same potential, and in fact, in any
work he felt that there is always the possibility to manifest basic goodness and
apply one's spiritual practice. However, after discussing the prevalence of
teachers who have uplifted classrooms, David acknowledged that "Somehow the
form is there, eh? To wake up somehow, in a school. It's kind of interesting, that
it would happen so often in a school. 'Cause, I mean maybe there is a difference
there ... You know, I'm not sure that there's a lot of doctors who would manifest
that in their job as much as teachers." Pierre made the same point when he
added that "The thing is, teaching is so much about educating ... you're so much
with kids and you sort of, they look at you as role model as well, so there's sort
of, you know, the whole situation sort of provides the opportunity to do that."

This point has been a constant thread throughout the thesis, but bears
repeating as it is connected with the next point. That is, that the teachers found
that their involvement with Buddhism and Shambhala training helped them to
extend, as well as bolster and promote the benefits of teaching as a kind of path,
to the rest of their lives. In essence, spiritual practice was seen to serve as a kind
of umbrella process which helped the teachers to integrate the various aspects of
their lives, and specifically to have the integration based on the development of a
spiritual presence in every aspect of their lives.

This view - that spiritual practice serves an integrating force in life - involves
a view of life activities as being on a kind of continuum. On this continuum, all of
one's activities exist, with limited boundaries between them such as when and
where they are carried out. These boundaries are as porous and tentative, and as
much the product of conceptualization, as the boundaries between self and other
discussed in chapter four. Just as seeing one's meditation and spiritual practice as
being confined to what happens on the meditation cushion, seeing any aspect of
one's life as being less spiritual, or less in need of being imbued with a spiritual
approach, is to misunderstand the teachings of Buddhism, and I would suggest of any spiritual tradition. Dewey's statement that "education, experience and life" are interwoven is another way of expressing the same point (Dewey, cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p. 415), and Miller makes much the same point again when he says that "Meditation, however, should not be restricted to sitting practice; rather it can infuse one's existence with a basic sense of connectedness. The person who meditates, then, can bring the same attention and groundedness that develops in sitting practice to his or her workplace. This centeredness and attentiveness can be a part of the living presence that others respond to." (Miller, 1994). Nonetheless, there are differences between the various activities in life. David pointed to the nature of the difference when he made the comment that there was a "form" in teaching that was unique.

**Formal Practice, Contemplative Practice, and Form**

The 'form' that David was talking about can be present in any activity. In formal practice, the form is the specific techniques - the liturgy, the mantra, instructions on how to relate with your mind and experience - all these are designed to wake you up in some way. In post-meditation, or any experience off the cushion, there are some activities that as David said: "...just seem to be better designed at sort of manifesting egolessness .... more conducive to waking up and not getting caught in ego." These activities are called contemplative practices, and include a large range of possibilities such as tea ceremony, calligraphy, some martial arts and many others.

The forms can be traditional, for example those that are closely linked with spiritual traditions such as 'Chado' or tea ceremony, and Zen Buddhism, or some kinds of choral singing and Christianity, or they can be forms that are
recognized in the discipline and then fostered by the individual such as David’s practice of Western calligraphy. The following description David gave was interesting as it also expressed the value of contemplative practices that is stressed in our sangha:

I think what was so great about calligraphy for me was that I didn’t chose it as a practice. It wasn’t until sort of Nalanda [the organization of contemplative arts] got going, I kept thinking, jeez, what practice should I do. I mean Rinpoche wanted all of us to do some practice. I was saying which one should I do? In the meantime I was doing calligraphy. For years, since 1980. And I never, I never, except for these things here [points to two calligraphies on the wall], this is true, I never finished anything. So for me it actually was a really great contemplative practice. I would practice, I would rip it up, I would practice, I would rip it up. This went on for years and years. I never once finished anything. And I finally realized that I had my practice.

What becomes clear in the above passage is that David practiced calligraphy without having first seen it as anything particularly contemplative. There was no sense of having a goal of making something that he could display, and he came to appreciate the focus and discipline of calligraphy without any need for such results. This is one of the marks of the flow experience that is the basis for Csikszentmihalyi’s distinction between pleasure and happiness mentioned in chapter two (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Happiness, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is a state of being that involves integration and a sense of the joy in life that comes from activities that are not based on solidifying ego through creature comforts and simple entertainment. This similarity points to another aspect of contemplative practices. A part of the reason that David and the other teachers engaged in these forms was because they found them to be enjoyable. However,
as Pierre said about his practice of Japanese flower arranging, while he did feel “passion” for ikebana, “It can be irritating ... It’s not total pleasure.” Instead of purely being about pleasure, he appreciated the power of the form to wake him up. The similarity between this description and the comments made earlier in the chapter about formal practice, indicate a shift in the continuum of life activities from those such as the formal practices which, while appreciated, can give rise to significant resistance, to the contemplative practices which from the teachers’ descriptions are more ‘enjoyable’.

The reason for the lengthy description of contemplative practices is to outline one of the aspects of the continuum of a spiritually imbued life. The contemplative practices are a particularly skillful way of helping to integrate formal practice with daily existence. They help us to recognize that the conventional sense of pleasure need not be the ultimate goal, as states of happiness that have a path quality are also available and provide a step toward understanding the joyful aspects of formal practice. They also help us to see that connecting with that same uplifting joy in all aspects of life is a possibility, even if the habitual patterns of ego still seek conventional forms of pleasure. The goal is to be able to do every activity as if it were a sacred act with the same need for mindfulness, compassion, and all that comes with a spiritual outlook and relationship with life. Not only the various practices, but teaching and even making a cup of coffee becomes an opportunity to wake up, so to speak. However, making a cup of coffee has less forms that help remind one of the possibility than teaching, the contemplative practices or formal practice.

Another point is that the power of the forms is related to the presence of formal practice in one’s life. The focused distillation of the spiritual process is only mirrored in the contemplative practices. Without this reference point and umbrella process, the lessons learned in the contemplative practice tend to lead
to a deep appreciation for the activity as a respite from the rest of life, but not as much of a source of inspiration for how to live the rest of one's life. In other words, without the influence of meditative practices, it is harder to extend the lessons of the contemplative practice into the rest of one's life.

To bring this back to teaching, I would suggest that teaching, as David suggested, has forms that are similar to a contemplative practice. As such, what is missing is a context and process that helps teachers make the most of the opportunities and extend the lessons and opportunities found in the forms of teaching, to the rest of their lives. The image that I want to present is one of a continuum that extends from formal practice, through contemplative practices to work and play and the rest of the mundane daily activities we all engage in. Each moment, regardless of where it falls in the continuum, is an opportunity to wake-up. The richness of the possibility is strengthened through spiritual practice. Within this image, teaching can be seen to straddle the line between contemplative practice and livelihood.

To return to the point that I have made a number of times in this thesis, the umbrella quality of formal spiritual practice need not be seen as a prerequisite for living an integrated life. The basic insight can exist in anyone whether they are engaged in a spiritual disciplines or not. Spirituality, and in the case of the teachers in this thesis - Buddhism and Shambhala training - are forms that have been developed to promote those integrative and awakening processes, and it is up to each individual interested in living such a life to find the forms that are most helpful for their journeys.
I feel that this is a good place to end the analysis. What I wanted to do in this chapter was to weave together the observations made by the teachers with some of my own experience, and then add lengthier explanations and interpretations where appropriate. Through this process, I strove to present the main points of how they perceived the interpenetration of their involvement with practice and their teaching, and their lives in general. This was done through examining the major specifics of change in detail, looking at both similarities and differences in the teachers’ experience. Through this, I hope that I was able to demonstrate both the helpful power of spirituality, or what Palmer called the “unconventional resources” (Palmer, 1993), as well as the diversity of ways in which individuals take up their spiritual journeys.
Epilogue

The thesis process has been a long one, as has been the thesis itself. There have been many steps along the way as insights grew and early assumptions changed. I hope that the text has not been too repetitive, but as I said in the prologue, it has been my experience that explaining the many aspects of a spiritual path and the diversity of ways of taking up such a path, can be very hard to present. Not only is there the basic difficulty that comes with explaining things that may not have been experienced or considered by the reader, but in Western society there are many preconceptions that arise from the dominant Judeo-Christian approach to spirituality and religion, on top of which, the fuzzy appropriation of many contemplative practices not only from Eastern traditions such as Buddhism, but also from Native American and even the range of Judeo-Christian spiritual practices, creates a situation where partial understandings and straightforward misunderstandings become embedded in the modern consciousness. In some ways, this thesis has been an experiment to see what actually comes across when one tries to illuminate a spiritual path as complex as Buddhism and the related Shambhala Training. In this final chapter I will first revisit the study question and address it, and then I will review the steps that I felt were necessary for a full exploration of the thesis question. Finally, I will point out some possible directions for future research.

The Question
The initial question posed at the beginning of the thesis was: whether there is an interpenetration of influences between the practice of Buddhism and teaching in a classroom at the elementary and high school levels; and if there is, what is the nature of that interpenetration. The question was based initially on my own involvement with Buddhism, and with teaching as I discussed in my personal narrative. Anecdotal evidence and what little literature exists in the field suggested that influences do exist, and that spiritual practice in general, and Buddhism in particular, can be of assistance to teachers in their professional lives. By extension, anyone can experience the benefits of spiritual practice, and, as was seen in the narratives, the benefits are not limited to one's professional life, but rather help to break down the conceptual barriers that segment one's life experience, thereby benefiting all aspects of one's life.

The narratives of the teacher/practitioners bore out these initial suggestions, and provided a rich and detailed description of the many ways the interpenetration manifests. They described the many nuances of the path, including the difficulties and challenges experienced along the way at different points in their spiritual journeys. There were no great epiphanic moments which erased the legacy of their confusion and habitual patterns, but rather there was a description of long processes that demanded much of each individual, and which, in turn and over time, provided them with support. Each teacher, in their own way and at their own pace, continue to work with these daily lessons and themes. Although they are all involved in the same community, their paths have markedly different characteristics, and the stories they presented illuminated the uniquely individual qualities that mark a committed engagement with spiritual practice. The major theme was the centrality of the practices, with other aspects serving to support the practices. Community, study, facing professional
challenges, and accepting and working with difficult life experiences were some of the major supporting aspects.

At the same time, the teachers were clear that teaching was a wonderful profession for a practitioner. The unique responsibility of the profession, with all of the challenges involved in helping young people to grow and mature, lends itself to the fostering of states of mind and ways of relating to environments that are resonant with spirituality. As was made clear by all, teaching is not an easy job, especially these days with the double blows of cuts to budgets and staff, and new and complicated problems faced by teachers and students. The presence of both the challenges that demand compassion, gentleness, energy and many other qualities that were also seen to be developed through spiritual practice, and of a professional tradition that helps support teachers in their development, makes of teaching a good career for a practitioner.

In the end, I feel confident to say that through an in-depth narrative analysis of the stories the teacher/practitioners were kind enough to share, the answer to the initial study question is that, indeed, spiritual practice can be of benefit to teachers, and in fact anyone who feels inspired to engage with spiritual practice, and that the benefits are mutually supportive.

Steps Along the Way

At this point, I want to revisit the steps that were taken in the thesis. Given the difficulties in talking about spirituality, I first felt it necessary to draw the distinction between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is the path-quality that can be found in any religious tradition. There are many forms of spiritual paths, but all of them involve a commitment to certain disciplines such as meditation, prayer, yoga, sweat lodges, and many, many others. These practices
are found in the context of their broader religious traditions which include doctrines and other aspects such as community gatherings in churches or temples, moral directives and often culturally based activities that have more to do with the country of origin than the tradition itself.

The spiritual practices serve to infuse all of the above with the aforementioned path-quality that helps to bring joy, compassion, a quality of being awake to life, integration of life experiences, and all of the other attributes discussed in the thesis. Without the practices, attendance at churches and temples can become a social phenomena with its own value, but without the richness of the spiritual processes. Choosing a tradition is a difficult process, and many spiritual teachers such as the Dalai Lama recommend staying with one's heritage rather than joining a tradition that is foreign to one's culture. However, if as in my case, one is drawn to another tradition, it is important to move carefully and with a critical eye that balances the openness that one brings to such an exhilarating exploration. There are ways to assess spiritual communities. Familiarizing oneself with the community members and the practices, along with the forms the spiritual path takes and the kinds of commitments necessary, helps a new practitioner to decide on the level of their commitment and the speed with which they want to make that commitment.

There are also some commonplaces among spiritual traditions that should be present and should manifest as fruition in senior members of the community. In chapter three, I discussed the main commonplaces such as an appreciation of space and the centrality of compassion or love, and practices designed to foster these qualities. As I discussed in my narrative in chapter two, arrogance can also often arise in new practitioners, and with it a kind of missionary zeal to convince others of the correctness of one's new found path. Eck and Spretnak were helpful in pointing out the need for an open minded, pluralistic approach to
other traditions. The open minded and open hearted approach they proposed, mirrors the same qualities that the practices should foster. However it is often hard to let go of the pride, just as I experienced in my initial years in the sangha.

In my opinion, an important step in the thesis was to present examples of teachers and institutions that are already promoting and developing ways of educating that is spiritual in orientation. This serves not only to contextualize my work and the comments made by my teachers, but also helps to overcome the possible despair that can arise when the immensity of the obstacles are brought into focus. Despair is paralyzing in general, and in particular can inhibit the very openness that spiritual practice seeks to develop. The examples of Miller, Palmer, Gatto, Eck, hooks, Spretnak, Berry, O'Sullivan and the others cited, as well as the teachers who gave their time to participate in the thesis, demonstrates that while there is much to do, there is also support available in a variety of forms and traditions.

In order to present a spiritual path, there must be some consideration given to the teachings and tenets of the tradition. In chapter three, I gave an overview of the major tenets of Tibetan Buddhism. The aim was not to be comprehensive, as that would entail volumes of books, besides which, there are many good references available in books stores. What is important is to make clear one’s affiliations, or in narrative terms, one’s location as the person presenting and interpreting both the tradition and the words of the participants. Narrative methods made this possible for me, and also freed me to hold rich interviews with the teachers. An aspect of my “location” was to make clear that I did not intend the final work to be an attempt to gather converts, but rather to provide an example of one spiritual tradition among many. As I was examining the tradition to which I belong, I hope that what I brought to the text was an
ability to explain what might otherwise have been difficult to understand, rather than a sanitized, proselytizing version.

In the narrative chapters, I presented the teachers' observations as much as possible in their own words. I avoided interpretation or the addition of explanations with the exception of places where terms and context needed to be explained. Then in the analysis chapter, I added my own experience to a presentation of the similarities and differences in the experiences the teachers observed of the interpenetration of their spiritual practice and their post-meditation experience. I focused on the teaching part of the continuum of post-meditation, while also presenting a view of life as a part of an integrated continuum imbued with a spiritual approach to life in general. As a part of this continuum, teaching was seen to have a unique position as a livelihood that lent itself to the applications of spiritual values and processes, with formal practice being a key to bringing all of life into a more integrated relationship. Through this integration, it is possible to extend the lessons and the power of teaching as post-meditation practice to the rest of the continuum, and to open teaching to similar influences. The above is a concise review of the steps that make up this thesis. It will be interesting to see what readers make of the process as a whole.

**Future Research Possibilities**

There are a number of possible research directions that I see arising from the work I have done so far. One possibility is to extend the work I have done in this thesis. It would be interesting to interview a wider range of teachers from within my community. There were certain limitations to my work that are
related to the scope possible in a qualitative Ph. D. thesis. The narrative approach demanded long hours of interviews and transcribing - I ended up with around four hundred pages of transcripts as well as field notes, notes taken during observations and commentary on all of these notes. With more time and financial resources, it would be possible to explore a wider range of teaching situations such as inner city schools; private, non-secular schools; and differences along ethnic, class and gender lines. In this study, there was not sufficient diversity to explore such differences.

Another possibility that interests me greatly is co-operative work with researchers who represent different traditions. I felt that being a member of the community that was being researched gave me insight that an outsider would not have had. To work with representatives of other traditions could broaden the exploration of spirituality and hopefully provide inspiration for people who want to explore those traditions. There is also the challenge that Eck spoke of when engaged in ecumenical work that can uncover assumptions and shadows that I may have missed. Working with a colleague from another tradition may help to uncover things that I was blind to. I am also simply curious about the differences between traditions, and feel that I would personally benefit from examining other traditions, both spiritually and as an academic.

Further possibilities exist in the area of practical recommendations. Through gathering the experiences of a variety of teachers, certain common obstacles as well as sources of inspiration and pedagogical tools may emerge. To share those kinds of insights could be a direct contribution to teachers. Simply making understandable what has previously been opaque is of itself valuable. If people are able to read this thesis, and through that come to understand something about themselves or about how others think and work, it may help to break down barriers to communication. All of the above suggestions for
future research are seen as contributing to this goal of fostering communication. In the end, there is much to do, much reason to do it, and much joy to be had in the doing.
Glossary

Abhidharma: The Buddhist teachings on the nature of mind - sometimes called the basis of a Buddhist psychology.

Dharma: The teachings of Buddhism, it can also mean truth.

Hinayana: lit. ‘lesser vehicle’ In Vajrayana Buddhism it represents the first of two of the stages on the path leading to the Vajrayana. Also used as a condescending term for Theravadin Buddhism.

Mahayana: lit. ‘greater vehicle’ From a practice perspective, the word is used to designate the second stage leading to the Vajrayana practices. More commonly used as one of the larger categories of Buddhism. It is differentiated from Theravadin Buddhism by its stress on postponing one’s enlightenment until all sentient beings achieve liberation or enlightenment.

Maitri: loving kindness

Mantra: A set of words that are repeated which have specific spiritual applications, often the name of a deity combined with some of her or his attributes. Most often used as a part of sadhana practice.

Practice: A general term meaning all spiritual practices. For example, “the practices of the Vajrayana...”

Raising Lungta/Windhorse: A short practice from the Shambhala tradition. It is used to raise one’s energy and to evoke awake mind states in any situation.

Sadhana: The main practices of Vajrayana Buddhism. There are literally thousands of sadhanas, each with particular applications. These practices typically take several hours to carry out, and some may only be practiced in retreat situations. The practices involve visualizations, mantras and sometimes different postures.
Shamatha: Breath meditation, also known as mindfulness practice. The first stage in shamatha/vipashyana. This stage involves focused awareness of the breath with some environmental awareness. Relaxing with the practice is essential and can be quite difficult.

Sangha: the community of fellow practitioners of Buddhism, it can include all Buddhists, or be used to mean only those members of the same community who study and practice with the same teacher.

Sitting: another word for practice, most often used for shamatha/vipashyana.

Tantra: lit ‘thread’ The implication of ‘thread’ is that one’s mindfulness maintains a constant stream of awareness throughout one’s daily activities. Tantra is another word for the Vajrayana sadhana practices.

Theravada: lit ‘the school of the elders’ This tradition of Buddhism places the emphasis on individual liberation, but still stresses the importance of compassion for all beings.

Tonglen: lit ‘exchanging self for others’ This is one of the practices of the Mahayana. It is used to change the habitual instinct for accumulating good things and good experiences for oneself, into generosity and compassion. The practice can be done in the moment, or more formally during sitting practice.

Vajrayana: lit ‘unbreakable or adamantine vehicle’ Vajrayana is the kind of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, and so it is often called Tibetan Buddhism, although it is also practiced in Mongolia, China and Japan.

Vipashyana: Insight or awareness meditation. It is the second step in shamatha/vipashyana meditation. The state of mind is said to arise naturally from the calm focus of shamatha meditation. It involves dropping the focus on the breath and developing a panoramic awareness without engaging in discursive chatter. With a different spelling it is also the name of a Theravadin sangha that has groups around the world.
Appendix I: Conferences and Schools

With all of the dire predictions of social, environmental and personal degradation and despair, it is helpful to look at examples of work that is being done these days in the realm of spirituality and education. The development of schools and conferences, and the recognition of writers such as Jack Miller holds the possibility for real change in society and for the development of some of the characteristics and qualities developed through spiritual practice. In recent years, there have been two major international conferences in the field. The first was held at the Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado, an accredited post-secondary institution dedicated to promoting contemplative education, and which was founded by Trungpa Rinpoche. The conference, held in Boulder in the spring of 1997 was called ‘Spirituality in Education’ and attracted a range of teachers, administrators and academics from around the world and from a variety of spiritual traditions. The Dalai Lama spoke at the conference, as well as teacher practitioners such as keynote speaker Parker Palmer, John Gatto, Ron Miller, Jeffrey Kane, bell hooks and Eagle Cruz.

One criticism voiced by the black feminist academic and Buddhist practitioner bell hooks, was that the conference was largely made up of Caucasians with only two African-American scholars presenting and very few ethnic minorities in the crowd. This issue is significant and must be contemplated, as the question of forging connections between various spiritual traditions mirrors the gulf in North American society between ethnic groups as a whole. This issue will be further discussed in the next appendix in the context of the divisions that exist within North American Buddhism.
Another conference held recently was the Holistic Education Conference at the Ontario Institute for Education (OISE) in 1998. Here again, a range of teachers, administrators and practitioners of various traditions gathered, with workshops ranging from Buddhist approaches to contemplative observation in teacher training by Richard Brown of the Naropa Institute, to a talk by the noted environmental activist John Seed, and a presentation by Jack Miller. Both conferences are scheduled to be held again. I mention these conferences in order to demonstrate the growth of interest in the field and the awareness among educators that spiritual approaches to education have much to offer teachers facing the challenges of educating at the turn of the millennium.

Another hopeful sign is the strength of schools such as the Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado, and elementary, middle and high schools that exist in Boulder and Halifax and which base their approach to education on a spiritual understanding of the world. These schools are open to anyone interested in having an education or having their children educated in an environment that recognizes the importance of a spiritual dimension in education. There are many religious communities which also recognize the spiritual dimension. In Toronto there is a Sikh school, Jewish schools, and of course a strong Roman Catholic School Board. There are also those which are not specifically affiliated with a religious tradition, such as the Waldorf schools which work with Rudolph Steiner’s Anthroposophy (Steiner, 1884, 1976). While these examples represent a growing interest and recognition of the importance of spirituality, my interest in this thesis is in working with teachers in the public school system who strive to live their spirituality in a secular environment. However, it would make an interesting study for the future to carry out similar research with teachers whose environment overtly supports and promotes their spiritual practice and tradition.
Appendix II: Buddhism in North America

Planting the Seeds

In her keynote address to the Buddhism in America Conference in San Diego in 1998, Judith Simmer-Brown, a senior teacher in my sangha and professor at the Naropa Institute, presented four criteria that must be met if Buddhism is to be established in America. These criteria are: the translation of key sutras, commentaries, teachings, practices and liturgies into usable (i.e.: not overly scholastic) English; the transmission of the essence teachings to American dharma heirs and students, and the need for these heirs to be seen as equals to their Asian counterparts; the establishment of a strong basis of American patronage; and the establishment of full monastic ordination among American monks and nuns (Simmer-Brown, 1999). These criteria are also applicable to the Canadian context, with the notable addition of the need for French translations.

In the context of my own sangha, these criteria have been met. We have translation committees which produce translations in English and French as well as other languages, senior teachers have been appointed as Acharyas empowered to teach and give transmissions of practices (permission and instruction on carrying out advanced practices), there is a group called the Shambhala Trust who provide seed money for projects within the sangha, and there is a thriving monastic community centered at Gampo Abbey on Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. While my sangha is one of the larger and more established ones in North America, these developments are reflected in other Vajrayana sanghas as well as traditions such as Zen and the Theravadin Vipassana community. Main stream book stores such as Chapters and
Amazon.com have extensive selections of books on Buddhism available, and publishers such as Shambhala Publications and Snow Lion Publications produce texts available on the open market.

However, whenever Buddhism is transplanted to a new culture, there are issues that arise and sometimes new schools of Buddhism are established, such as the birth of Cha’an (Zen in Japanese) Buddhism with the coming of Buddhism to China. While it is too early to tell what, if any, new schools will develop in the West, there are some interesting tensions that have arisen in the arrival and establishment of Buddhism in the West that bear looking at.

**Race, Culture and Gender**

A prime example of the tensions and issues that arise is that within Buddhism in the United States there are ethnic divisions that exist along sangha lines such as the large percentage of African-Americans in Sokka Gakkai or Nichiren Shosho Buddhism and relatively few in traditions such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. There is a tendency among some Buddhists of traditions that emphasize mediation to look down at the Sokka Gakkai sangha with its stress on proselytizing and the initial achievement of material benefit, but the apparent success of the movement among certain segments of society speaks to the power of the practices. Furthermore, there has been some bad press about the movement, accusing it of placing too much emphasis on material gain. In Nichiren Shosho Buddhism, Richard Causton presented an insider’s explanation of the path and the stages through which the practitioner moves. The initial motivation of material benefit is later expanded to include more of a Mahayana attitude toward the bettering of all sentient beings, in keeping with the core teachings of the Buddha (Causton, 1990).
The above example is one of the grosser manifestations of the sectarianism present in Western Buddhism, one which often combines traditional rivalries such as those between the lineages of the various yanas with Western prejudices. This confusion is further complicated in the split between Buddhists who are born into their tradition, generally within ethnic communities, and converts to Buddhism. Issues arise such as the snobbery of the converts who emphasize the practice of mediation, and the snobbery of those born into the traditions who may conflate cultural familiarity with an understanding of the dharma. While both sides have some valuable points to share, the development of community within diversity, and an understanding of the ways in which traditional Buddhist cultures combine features of Buddhist teachings with other cultural aspects that do not relate to the transmission of the dharma, is still in need of contemplation and dialogue. With the birth of second generation Buddhists born to the early Western converts to Buddhism, there is a growing emphasis and exploration of how cultures and communities are developed and an expanding recognition and application of life rituals such as marriages and coming of age ceremonies.

A further complication is that many retreat programs are run on shoe string budgets so that while attempts are made to provide scholarships, bursaries and grants to alleviate the sometimes high costs, there is no way to avoid the need for charging money to hold, house and feed groups of people or to host teachers and run centers in urban settings. This financial obstacle exacerbates the class divisions that already exist between some sanghas, and serves as a barrier for anyone of limited means from spending longer periods in isolated retreat situations. The significance of retreat practice will be discussed in the narrative and analysis chapters.
In my experience, overt racism is not a major problem among converted practitioners of Buddhism who tend to be at least liberal in their politics. However in any situation where generally white, educated people gather in community, there are undoubtedly assumptions and forms of exclusion that people are not aware of, and in fact would probably be horrified to discover. Some obstacles are obvious such as the historical factors of the early converts to Buddhism in North America being generally young hippies who tended to be educated and white. From this connection the spreading of the dharma organically happened among similar populations through friends, family, co-workers and others who felt a greater degree of comfort and familiarity with the already existing demographic slice.

In her book “Wounds of Passion” (hooks, 1993), as well as in her regular column in the Shambhala Sun magazine, bell hooks explores her experiences and observations of, among other things, the dynamics of race, class and gender in American Buddhism. It is interesting to note that in the letters to the editor in the Shambhala Sun, there are as many letters that express support as there are that express bewilderment and irritation with her politically and socially aware commentary. The regular column by Ken Wilber that often both challenges and makes use of post-modern theorists blends well with hooks’ work, as both authors write from a spiritual perspective while including modern critical traditions of social commentary. Reading their work which makes use of their years of studying forces such as patriarchy, racism and classism, and specific manifestations of these forces both within the Buddhist community as well as in society at large, while making use of their years of practice and study of the dharma, has helped me to understand how oppression is in essence a manifestation of the fear and confusion that the Buddha spoke of in the second noble truth. At the same time, using these critical traditions has been helpful in
recognizing the liberatory aspirations and the possibilities for working with post modern theorists such as Habermas and Nagel (Wilber, 1999).

Another interesting example of occasional tensions is evident in the large Jewish population in North American Buddhism. There have been a number of books written on the situation such as: "That’s funny, you don’t look Buddhist" by the Theravadin meditation teacher Sylvia Boorstien (Boorstien, 1997) on her experience of converting to Buddhism and on her re-appreciation of her Jewish routes and the wisdom of Judaism; "A Jewish Mother in Shangri-la" (Rosenzweig, 1998) about a Jewish mother who, while initially dismayed at her son’s conversion to Buddhism, came to reconcile herself to the situation when she accepted her son’s invitation to tour retreat centers in Europe and Asia to meet his teachers; and "The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet’s Rediscovery of Identification in Buddhist India" (Kamenetz, 1994).

The tension between religious-ethnic communities who face assimilation in modern western society and members of that community who convert in search for answers to their spiritual searching was addressed by the Dalai Lama at the Naropa conference mentioned in the last chapter. When asked about Westerners converting to Buddhism, he insisted a number of times that it is best to stay with the tradition you are born into, but finally agreed that if you feel that you cannot do that, then it might not be a bad thing to explore Buddhism. This comment, combined with the quotation in the introduction by the Dalai Lama about helping and not converting others, expresses the general aspiration of Buddhist teachers in North America, and I hope can stand as an example to spiritual teachers from all traditions. While it is human nature to want people to agree with you and join your ‘club’, this approach gives rise to aggression, competitiveness and tribalism: characteristics that are not very helpful in working with the problems that already beset us.
The Guru

Another tension point in Western Buddhism is the role in some traditions of the guru, or the root teacher. Within Tibetan Buddhism, the guru is not only the main teacher of a given sangha, but also plays an essential role in some of the practices carried out in the vajrayana stage of the path. The relationship with the guru as a manifestation of enlightened presence reflecting the enlightened mind within the practitioner is central to the efficacy of the practice and is often discussed using devotional language that is foreign to most traditions in the West. For many, it smacks of the worst abuses of cults and the abusive control of manipulative self-aggrandizers who feed off of their victims. Those difficulties should not be hidden, and within my sangha there have been problems that have caused controversy and significant suffering.

Questions around sex between teachers and students has been one of the major flash points of controversy in many Buddhist sanghas, and has lead to more than one teacher being asked to leave his or her community. This particular issue is examined in detail in Sandy Boucher’s “Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism” (Boucher, 1993) as well as by other authors such as Rita Gross (Gross, 1993). In the more balanced presentations of the issue, there is a recognition that knee jerk reactions to sexual relations is not helpful, and that although there are and have been some teachers who take advantage of their students for their own gratification, there are situations where sexual relations between student and teacher in the context of devotion and an integrated approach to all of experience as teaching and learning, can be situations of powerful teaching and profound learning (Boucher, 1993).
Questions around the guru relationship and its applicability to our modern Western context exist over less dramatic issues than sexuality. In the Buddhist journal Tricycle, there have been articles questioning and sometimes attacking Tibetan gurus, and some members of Tibetan sanghas question whether the journal has a bias against guru lineages of Buddhism. I personally experience this question with my brother who left a community over the role of his guru.

There is no way to resolve the issue. Time will tell if people are benefited through their involvement in the various lineages of Buddhism, and all traditions that can trace their lineage back to the Buddha through direct teacher-student relations have beneficial potential. Of course it is the experience of many members of my sangha that their path has benefited them and that their relationship with their guru has been a powerful force in their spiritual path. My relationship with my guru remains a powerful aspect of my engagement with Buddhist practice, and one which deepens as I continue to develop the relationship. Fortunately, there is no need to pump-up some kind of ‘pop star’ devotion for him, but rather to allow the organic development of devotion to arise from this appreciation.
Appendix III: Self Awareness

In this appendix, I will discuss the four ways in which the teachers were aware of the effects of their involvement in Buddhism and Shambhala training in their teaching and their lives in general. In other words, given the difficulties in making direct correlations between their spiritual practice and the rest of their lives, by what means did the teachers become aware of the changes they had undergone?

All of the teachers gave clear and often repeated statements regarding the difficulty in making unequivocal causal or developmental links between their practice and what they observed as benefits and changes in their lives. Nonetheless, connections were made, and sometimes quite clear connections. These connections came about through four general processes: an interview process whereby we would return to topics within interviews as well as between interviews, personal historical comparisons, comparisons with others, and working with awareness in the moment.

Circling Back

In no particular order, the first to be discussed here occurred through circling back to topics. In the interviews, comments about the difficulties in making connections usually came early in the conversation, while later they began to make observations where they drew clearer connections. It was through the contemplative nature of the discussions that we were able to identify these areas. Much of the credit for this process goes to the narrative approach which left me the freedom to circle back to topics unencumbered by a
rigid set of questions. This circling and meandering process was also carried out between interviews, as the teachers were able to contemplate some of the issues under discussion. The key here in my mind is that with contemplation, the initial fears of appearing either too simplistic or too concrete about direct connections were mollified, and the teachers relaxed enough into the interview process to recognize that I did not have a set agenda where I was looking for specific kinds of answers.

At one point during a group interview, David asked the others if they had "figured out what Michael was doing in your classrooms," and throughout the interviews, all of the teachers asked if they were on topic a number of times. As the interviews progressed, these kinds of questions diminished, and the teachers were less qualified in their answers. Of course there are other potential explanations for this pattern, some of which might imply that the teachers simply got sloppy with their responses, or that they were trying to give the kinds of answers that they felt I was looking for.

The best response that I can give to this is to note that all four of the teachers felt that their narratives were accurate. David also wryly told me that while he thought the interviews were an accurate representation of his experience at the time of the interviews, there was a part of him which wished that he sounded more "together" or "provocative and dharmic", the implication here being that the narratives did not idealize the teachers. Louis in his phlegmatic way said much the same thing. Susan said that she had found more equilibrium in her practice since the time of the interviews, and both Pierre and Ron was a little surprised at some of the things that they had told me. Ron added that some things have changed, but he still felt that perhaps he was having difficulties with commitment, although he and the other teachers are all still practicing and involved in the sangha.
Historical Comparisons

The second process involved historical comparison. All of the teachers spoke of some degree of change - observations they based on comparisons with their past. While the specific issues they spoke of will be discussed in the third section of this chapter, I will mention a few by way of example. For Susan, there was the clarity that came from recognizing that her initial expectations were too simple and directly developmental. This combined with her observation that Buddhism provided a synthesizing and clarifying philosophical basis for her previous studies and practices, an observation that Ron made as well. Both of these factors were presented in the interviews as comparisons with what she had previously believed or hoped for.

In Ron’s case, he felt that he was better able to work with his emotions through the spaciousness that practice brought, as well as through influences such as some of the teachings presented on the weekend programs, for instance the “It just doesn’t matter” slogan that he found helped defuse potentially volatile encounters. In Pierre’s case, he was able to resolve the buried pain that had twice so completely undermined his ability to live a normal life. Furthermore, the suffering he experienced in those moments declined as his ability to practice for extended periods increased. For David, his loss of interest in fantasy literature and action movies indicated the sea change he had gone through wherein he was more interested in relating directly with what was actually happening in the world than in escaping through entertainment. David pointed out an important aspect of the changes when he gave the traditional metaphor of a drop of water “that is falling for a million years and eventually makes a hole in the rock, you know, it took a long time.” According to David, the changes have been gradual and “It’s only if I look back - because I still feel
confused - I know that I’m not as confused as I used to be, and I know that the kinds of things that used to take up my time and energy were more self-centered.”

Comparisons with and by Others

The third means that some of the teachers found to comment on the effect of practice in their lives was through comparisons with other people. Both David and Ron made comments about teachers they knew who were excellent teachers, but seemed to have difficulty extending their uplifted presence in the classroom into the rest of their lives. David made the point quite clearly when he responded to my question of whether he had any insight into his life by saying: “Only when I see other people. You know, like I go Oh God, how could they miss that?” To balance this observation, all of the teachers stated that they saw fellow teachers, and in some cases students, as having characteristics that they admired and wished to bring into their own lives.

Both Ron and David also mentioned that others had noticed differences in their behaviour either from other times in their lives, or between them and other teachers. Ron mentioned that his girlfriend could tell when he had been practicing. Some of Miller’s students also wrote of how people close to them had noticed positive changes in their behaviour (Miller, 1994). When David told his assistant that he had a Buddhist friend coming in to see if “Buddhist teachers shouted as loudly as other teachers.” She said that they didn’t. Although somewhat facetious, the essence of the comment was that she did notice a difference, and that she associated at least some of the difference with David’s involvement with Buddhism.

Working in the Moment
The fourth and final process was through stories of actual events in their lives both inside and outside the classroom. The majority of the stories used to support the connections were of events such as the use of practices like tonglen, or ways in which they were able to work with situations in the moment. While each teacher had different areas they focused on, there were many similarities. For both Pierre and Ron, working with their emotions was central to their paths. For Donald, the extension of the mahayana vision and the application of Shambhala teachings on creating an enlightened society seemed to be central to his path. For Susan, self-discipline, wherein committing to the practice and applying what she knew to be beneficial, but felt either too disorganized, too busy or temperamentally unsuited to, was the central issue.

While recognizing these different areas of interest and focus are important, it is also important to avoid over-simplification. For example, while it can be said that in the interviews Pierre emphasized working with emotions more than David who spoke more about working with others, both of them recognize the importance of the other aspects. As I mentioned in the beginning of his narrative, Pierre has put an enormous amount of energy into working with the community as an administrator, a teacher and a meditation instructor. He also made the point himself when he described his reason for practicing, saying: “I’m not practicing so that I have the experience. I’m practicing to be open. To open up to the others, you know, my fellow sentient beings.” David’s discussion of working with others was couched in the language of working with emotions and mind. The over-simplification would be to make a facile connection to the hinayana focus on working with oneself in Pierre’s case, and the mahayana focus on working with all sentient beings in David’s case, and from this falling into the trap of trying to build some kind of hierarchy. I hope it is clear that the
differences reflected the individual's interests, and not their level of spiritual development.

For each individual, there were stories of small epiphanies based on successes and apparent short-term failures that illustrated the effects of their involvement with Buddhism and Shambhala training. Sometimes the effect was simply to be aware of the issues that they had the most difficulty with, while at other times the stories illustrated changes that had occurred in their lives and in their presence in the classroom. The very fact that they were aware of such issues is in itself partly a manifestation of their practice, if for no other reason than that the ways in which they spoke of them illustrated the internalization of the vocabulary that reflects an exploration of the nature of mind through meditation.


