

DOING THE THING YOU LOVE

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for Bala Jaison*

ABSTRACT

The feeling of love has immense traction upon the soul.

The waters of our lives fall naturally into one flow, once love for some one thing has its uniting effect upon our experience of agency. We can't direct our lives by words which others let fall behind them. It can't be done. The words are dead wood. Rather, we act when the sap rises. We are drawn forward or swept into action by what rises from our roots. This is the disinterested fact of love. Up to a point, it doesn't much matter what we love, provided the stream is limpid.

It is through a naturally emergent process of Focusing that we come into contact with our loving, and that love holds its sway over our lives.¹

*I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.*
— W B Yeats

*Some say an army on horseback,
some say on foot, and some say ships,
are the most beautiful things
on this black earth, but I say
it is whatever you love.*

— Sappho,
translated by Stanley Lombardo²

1. A woman sat down with me for a first Focusing session. "Is there," she said, "a way to do this that isn't hippy-dippy?"

So we looked about a little, and we found two things. Hippy-dippy has to do with wrapping yourself up in a private world of comfort, and has to do with digging up the dead.

She said, "I'm very good at digging up the dead."

So we made a Zero Zombies Zone. I put it to her, as I put it to you, that Focusing need not be about going to painful places, or dwelling there in love or hope or grief. Focusing can be about doing the thing you love.

I wondered what she loves, and what would make more of that.

She said, “I am completely uncreative.” I said, “Well, that’s a good sign.”

She looked a little startled at this. It seemed I’d better say something more: “How come a voice would tell you with such acrid emphasis, ‘You have nothing to say’, unless in fact you did have something to say?” — “Oh”, she said, “Oh. Now that’s a new way to look at it.”

She said, “I made a beautiful stained glass window, and I mounted it in my kitchen door where people can see it.”

I said, “That’s wonderful. I hear from people who hide their work for twenty years.” — “Do they?” she asked. Indeed they do.

I said a few words about how people use various strategies to deal with “rancour” (the name I use for that persistent putting-down voice of energy) which cramps or block your creative power.

She said, “When I’m driving, stories come. I never write them down.”

I hazarded a guess: “You have a dream so vivid you could never, ever forget it, and then you go to the bathroom, and bye-bye dream, it’s gone forever.” Yes, just like that.

“But I could record myself when I’m driving.” She might try that.

She said: “I always try so hard.” I said, “You need this to be something which happens without any conscious effort.” She said, “Yes. Yes. I like that. I’d like to have something in my life which would happen without any conscious effort.”

These early stages, as a person begins to love the thing she loves, are frail and delicate. There are many ways to leave the path. It may be a while before there is a clear path.

“This isn’t what I expected,” she ended. “It isn’t what I came for. When can I come again?” We both laughed. I felt I had found a friend.

She had found a place which held both panic and excitement. She could go back to that place. Clearly it was time for the music to form a cadence.³

2. Now, one of the things I want to say to you is that, unlike psychotherapy, which perhaps should not go on for ever and ever, keeping company with a person whilst she is doing the thing she loves might on occasion be a lifelong thing.

My “oldest inhabitant”, the person to whom I have given piano lessons for the longest time, has been with me now for twenty-nine years. There are many things too private to write here, things all but unspoken or unsayable, ways in which piano-playing has illuminated his life and love, and been a place of peace at various times of trouble.

All I want to point to just now is the permanence of the relationship. There are relationships in our lives which should not be forever; others, which are essentially, like the mating of pigeons, a lifelong affair.

I have now a number of people in my life who have taken it for granted from their earliest memories that they would study piano-playing with me; for whom my presence in

their lives is a bare fact like the sky. Eleanor I met in the spring of 1980, when she was just two years old. Now she is licensed to be at the helm of a battleship. Our friendship is not quite as it was when I used to sit on the end of her bed reading stories.

Ailish gave me an old-fashioned look yesterday. Ailish is eleven by now, I suppose. But in many ways she's more grown up than I am. I was being very silly, pretending to stab her with a pencil. "I know I'm going to be a doctor," she said austerely, "but right now I'm still squeamish." We laughed and went back to our Bartók.

3. Cleo Nordi danced with Pavlova. She had a curious power to transmit some of the magic of that great dancer to a later age. ("My dear," said the all-too-audible old lady, as Pavlova was dancing *The Dying Swan* in Edinburgh, "isn't she *awfully* like Mrs Wishart?") I remember how, each time Peter Darrell created a new role for Elaine Macdonald, Elaine would whisk herself away to London to go through it with Cleo, and come back miraculously transformed: precise, strong, fluid, elegant, frail, and infinitely touching.

So long as Elaine was dancing, she would of course wish Peter to be there on one side, Cleo on the other.

Anna Paskevka writes:

I rely primarily on Legat's precepts as taught by Cleo Nordi. This is a system of educating the body and mind that optimizes the body's ability to move and the mind's ability to discover the logic within motions. Classical ballet can then be understood in terms of its dynamics and physics, avoiding dogma, thus recognizing it as a living and evolving art form.

This approach acknowledges both the range of motion available to us and the relationship with the space in which we move. The system's most salient features are the recognition of gravity's impact on motion, and the inclusion of the potential of the spine to spiral, expressed in the use of épaulement.⁴

Once I watched Elaine coaching Judy Mohekey: making fine, precisely focused physical suggestions about the balance and movement of the spine, the extension of the arms; about the placing of the fingers, the angle of the foot; little things, often, which one could scarce imagine being visible from out front.

I said to Elaine: "Isn't it true, that if you enter deeply enough into the feel and sense of the role, you will find the right quality for the steps?" She looked at me quite sharply, a little sideways. "You can take that too far," she said. "Don't forget that when you find the exact movement, it can't fail to take you into the heart of the role. It goes both ways. You miss something when you forget that."

Yes. It's like that in piano-playing, too. It's not enough to hear the notes. You must hear also the fine play of overtones, as one note reacts with another. There is magic there. Debussy said, "I have just been exploring the latest discoveries in harmonic chemistry." Thus from sensory detail, mood and meaning forms.

I remember Peter clutching me as he was watching Elaine dance: “Those arms! Look at those arms!” He had tears in his eyes. Who would not?

The day I watched Elaine coaching Judy, the work was *Five Rückert Songs*, a ballet about love and loss, to songs by Gustav Mahler, conceived in the anguish and bewilderment of a broken spirit:

The poem is by Friedrich Rückert:⁵

If you love me for beauty’s sake,
oh, do not love me!
Love the sun,
she has such golden hair!

If you love me for youth’s sake,
oh, do not love me!
Love the spring,
who is young every year!

If you love me for treasure,
oh, do not love me!
Love the mermaid,
whose many pearls are clear!

If you love me for love’s sake,
Yes then, love me,
Love me always, forever,
As I love you always, forever.

“If you love me for love’s sake...”

And I think there is one thing, more than any other, which fouls our dancing, writing, gardening or piano-playing. It is when there is something we love to do, yet we cease to love it for love’s sake. It is when the thing you love becomes something you do to win applause; or in order to run away from your life; or in some sense, *faute de mieux*.

It is, alas, too easy to betray the one you love.

4. There are, I think, three things here: the thing you love, the person you love, and your love for yourself. Mostly I am writing here about the first of these; but it will be as well to say a few words about each in turn:

The thing you love

We cannot direct our lives by moral principles, which come from outside ourselves. In that form, the form of reason or law, they have no purchase on our power of agency, our natural motive power. We need to be drawn forward or impelled into action by feelings of love.

We love many things: gardening or justice; football or meditation; Athens or dinner-parties; Experiential Focusing or the Differential Calculus. Up to a point, it doesn't much matter what you love, provided the stream is limpid.

Though naturally, if you have the great misfortune to love something which is evil, which is in some sense ruinous or corrupting, then you do indeed have a problem.

Suppose for a moment that there is a guy who finds that he loves to torture people. ("They say the Beast of Belsen had a beautiful home life.") I am asking you to think of him as being appalled by this joy, which he finds in himself; but at the same time, as recognising in himself that it is (at least on the face of it) a genuine love. (Are there not a great many of these guys about? In Beijing? In Singapore? In Riyadh? In Guantánamo? Or for that matter, in Washington or Geneva, since the power-holder may feel no need to be personally present, in a gross or vulgar way.)

You will grasp two points at once: one is that the guy has fallen into a very serious predicament, since the feeling of love has immense traction upon his soul; the other, that there are vanishingly few people to whom he can turn for help. Of those very few, I surmise that almost none will be psychotherapists. Most will be artists, some of whom do know how to transcend the unthinkable, to lean into some kind of redemption at (what we vaguely call) "a higher level" — meaning, through art or music, words or images.

Let's leave these troubled waters, and return to dry land.

In ordinary cases, the waters of our lives fall naturally into one flow, once love for some one thing has its uniting effect upon our experience of agency. It brings together impulses and energies which were formerly scattered, or were dispersed in boring forms of time-wasting.

Once we are at one, through doing the thing we love, what need is there of digging up the dead?

The person you love

Doing the thing you love may come between you and the person you love. Or may give you needed space from one another. Or may be the vehicle for your love of one another.

I shall say something about the last two of these possibilities, which are what I mostly live with in my work. Children who learn the piano do well if there is a parent around who knows when music is a vehicle for being together, and when it is a vehicle for growing independence. This is elusive ground. We need not feel surprised that we often make a mess of crossing it.

One sees at once that the answers may not lie in teaching the child Focusing. Perhaps the child has Focusing already? Perhaps asking the child to go inside would be indelicate or intrusive?

But the parent falls naturally into a kind of Focusing, because the intricacies of the dance are intangible, and the dance is on shifting ground.

Another metaphor. When the fire flickers, we look around, either for fuel, or to see what is dowsing it. So I never say, "It will help if I teach you Focusing." But I myself am

making the turn to Focusing, because the forward movement is stopped. And that turn is contagious. People catch it from you.

I hear: “He’s doing so much better at school, since he came to you.”

I ask a boy: “How’re you doing?” — “Fine.” — “Ay, right.” (Privately, I don’t believe him.) I ask, “So on a scale from zero to ten, how fine are you?” — “Four.” — “Aha,” I remark, “That kind of ‘fine,’” and we both laugh. Suddenly he is some sort of fine, fine enough for now, at any rate.

Or a woman says: “Now I must go back into the hospital to tell a baby’s parents that it’s time to let him go. There isn’t any training for that.” We sit at that place of mourning for a moment, whilst she gathers some reserve of courage and compassion.

For some years, I used to see Vivien, who was slowly dying of cancer. She came because she wanted to write music, and stayed until the day when she said, “I’m happy to be here to see another Spring.” Foolishly, I failed to grasp that this was both forewarning and farewell. A week or two later she died. Into music Vivien poured many feelings of protest and of peace, feelings she would not put into words, or which were too finely wrought for words to be their medium.⁶

The space of being with students of all ages, and with parents, is one into which Focusing seeps naturally.

As I am listening to a person, I am asking: “What is one thing to say here, on which we can hang everything else?” I learned this question from my own teacher, Sulamita Aronovsky. I spend my days feeling down into it. It doesn’t matter whether we are playing the piano or Focusing. The question is the same.

I guess it might be like cutting diamonds or something: quite a small tap in just the right place; and suddenly, here is a mass of shimmering reflections.

A final thought about the person you love. That same great man of the theatre, who created the ballet on Rückert songs, wrote at the end of his life:

*There have really been only two people of importance in my later life _____,
for teaching me how to love, and _____, for being there to love.*

I take seven things from this: that the thing you love can never substitute for the person you love; that loving is a form and a source of agency, not essentially a feeling; that loving is something we learn; that learning to love another human being is the most beautiful of the things which we may learn, in the course of doing the thing we love; that love is hungry for the loved one; that love for the loved one is lived by a kind of commitment to the things which are beloved of your loved one; and that this loving commitment, which must of course be open-hearted, may even have the fierceness of the tiger.

Your love for yourself

Spinoza says that the ability to love yourself is the highest achievement in a human life.⁷

It's no good, when you beat yourself over the head with the thing you love; squeezing bitter juices from the sweetest fruit. Be self-friendly, self-tolerant, self-understanding. Let a certain natural energy of loving draw you along; and be wary of fatigue or tension or frustration, which may open the gulfs of misery.

You need a lot of forgiveness for yourself when (as Schnabel says) you are dealing with "music which is better than it can be played". Into that gap creep goblins of malice. Unless you are easy with yourself, they will destroy you.

Jump out of the flood. Shake off the water from your fur. Once your energies are free, you can give it your best shot. First you have to free up your power of intention. You must commit yourself. And then you have to be carefree, to find a certain insouciance. Let's go for it! Who cares, what may happen?

In sum: I have spoken of the Focusing I am doing myself, as a companion to love; of the contagion by which a parent is infected with Focusing; and of a faint impalpable transmission of a Focusing attitude, by which the person I'm Focusing with or playing the piano with or whatever is in some small measure renewed and enlivened.

5. I want to say a few words about "the real thing". Like, there are lots of musical or mathematical or theatrical or animal-loving people; but once in a while, one meets the real thing. My sense is: the real thing is truly different. I don't think it's a matter of degree.

For most people, the felt sense of a piece of music is in a body space. There is a distinct emotional tone, some kind of complex emotional shiver. I don't think it's like that at all for Mozart. When Mozart has a sense of the piece, he says it's "like a building". For sure. But where does he feel it? Not I think in the physical body, nor in any literal space whatsoever. It seems he feels it in a pure music "space", caught between time and eternity.

I watch Gavin turn away when I play, and am aware of funny synaesthetic movements of his body as he listens. It's not like the listening of an ordinary person. He enters a pure music space. Not a body-sensed space, if that means any kind of internal body sensation. It is a space made of and for sound, which hangs there almost palpably in the room.

Or I hear Richard talking about maths. Yes, he grasps a problem as a whole. One day, during a lecture on fluid mechanics at Cambridge University, he stood up and told the lecturer, "You are using a bad method." It would never occur to Richard that this was tactless. He is simply reaching into pure mathematical space and lifting out elegance.

Or I watch Nick acting. I suppose you might find the acting a shade primitive as yet, but that's not the point. There's a way in which he falls effortlessly into performance, and holds you there, which is not like you or me trying to act. There is a natural upsurge. It would seem seriously otiose to me, if I were say to Nick, "Can you feel your sense of this role in your body?"

But I might say, "Who is this person you're talking to? How come she feels like this?" Or, "I can't tell from your acting where she is. I can't tell how she's taking what you say." Then he will reach into a pure acting space, and something will happen.

For sure, the pure acting space is embodied. Where else could it be? (This is what I call “the rhetorical body”.) But that body is not exactly felt. It’s just there. Somewhere and nowhere. The “body” of Nick’s acting is not precisely “the felt body” of Focusing in psychotherapy. And please: we don’t want to get into an Alice in Wonderland world where people have feelings which they don’t feel.

Does Nick or Richard or Gavin have a felt sense? Well in one sense, yes of course; but not in another. If you think you can get these guys to rummage around in their body sensations, you’ve got another think coming. Still, when you meet them right where they are, you will find yourself asking, “If *this* isn’t Focusing, then what is?”

6. Now I must go and play Bach. Why? Just because. The great cycle of the *Preludes and Fugues* sits and looks like a Pekinese on a cushion; and I hear it calling like a nightingale, as the warm spring dawn is breaking.

Have no illusions. It’s not easy, doing the thing you love. It turns you inside out and re-makes you like a new birth. Still, as Gusztáv Fenyő said to me one day,

*When we play this music,
you become a better person.*

And maybe that is even so.

A COMMENTARY ON “DOING THE THING YOU LOVE”

When Bala Jaison and Paula Nowick read what I had written, they passed some questions to and fro. Unwilling to disturb the fabric of what I wrote at first, I shall essay some answers here.

1.) BALA and PAULA: *Could you name somehow the contrast between what you did in your beginning days and what you’re doing now, giving the reader some sense of your evolution?*

ROB: Kenneth is ten. We had a blazing row a few days ago. Still, he’s a friend, and it seems I’m forgiven. He just sent his best friend over, and he said: “Clare, go and see Rob. He’s a really good teacher. He doesn’t tell you what to do. He shows you something, and lets you do it your own way.” That’s pretty big of Kenneth, all things considered. And pretty shrewd, I should say. Perhaps I used to think the teacher knows stuff and passes it on to the person. Now I mostly think on my feet: “What’s this guy at? Is there something I can say here? And how do I get out of the way?”

You know how it is. After the first sixty thousand sessions, I found I had become very free. More and more, I’m just myself — intense or insouciant, serious or playful, chatty or reserved, kind or irreverent; in a way quite wayward on the surface, though continually touching and tapping the space of you-and-me, continually feeling forward.

Teaching Focusing, like teaching piano-playing, goes well, when I'm mostly concerned to learn something from the person. Anyway, I'm ill at ease with the missionary position.

2.) BALA and PAULA: *Is it that Focusing doesn't have to be a structured thing?*

ROB: I like to draw a line between Focusing "direct-style" and Focusing "story-style". Direct-style is one way to use a dedicated Focusing session. It may follow steps, or be a natural Focusing process. In direct-style there is a vivid awareness of the body, of patterns of energy and sensation. Yet we began Focusing (did we not?) in story-style: with people in counselling sessions, pausing in the thick of conversation.

Whenever I'm with another person, I find that I must continually be turning inwards. Over and over, I vigorously discard some deadening formula or ritual. And since Focusing is contagious, as I never tire of saying, people catch from me this rhythm of making an inward turn. "We make the turn to Focusing," says Gene Gendlin, "when the forward movement is blocked." And so we do.⁸

FOCUSING AND LISTENING — a conversation

What are Focusing and Listening? And how do these two relate? I am happy to let the whole thing rest on four pillars. In what follows, as in real life, a Focuser says, "*I need...*", and a Listener answers, "*I offer...*"

1. Relational depth

FOCUSER: *Above all, you and I must feel we are in touch with one another. Garry Prouty is spot on, when he puts human contact in the first place. My friend Ann once said to me: "Now I have it. You mean, you are the miner's canary of contact." Yes. Exactly so. For the canary, it is a matter of life and death.*

LISTENER: Sometimes I may say something to renew our contact, to let you know I'm here — and who I am in myself, my feelings, and my being with you.

2. Experiential search

I am the expert on my life, both on what to say and how to move forwards. It is my life. I know how to find my way.

I'm listening to you. I try to take in every wrinkle of what you are saying, to follow each turn you make. I'm unhappy until each of us is sure that I've caught the sense and flavour of your meaning; that I am learning (enough) what this is like for you.

Then a magical silence may fall, into which the next piece comes.

3. The new space

Here is the bit which is unique to Focusing.

Sometimes all the feelings which come inside the situation die down, as waves breaking on the shore die down over several days, following a storm out at sea. Now comes the peace of a new day and calm at the water's edge. Without ruffling up a fresh storm, I let some mild new sense come to me of the-storm-as-a-whole.

*Some way puzzled,
I sense the whole of that.*

*Now I am not that,
nor does it burden me.*

*Gray skies are parted,
and the air is clear.*

This is the crucial shift, which tends to happen all by itself. The shift is from being IN the space of the situation, to the situation being IN the new space, the space of Focusing. Of the mild new sense which forms there, Mozart says, "It is like an apple in the palm of my hand."

Amongst the freedoms I allow myself is this — to say something intended to lead to an opening up of the new space — or which says "Hello there" to the apple which is lying in your hand.

*Apples fall when they are ripe.
An apple fell into your hand.
I see it cradled there.*

4. The open space

I'm just some guy sitting there, right? Just an ordinary person, a bit of a fool.

People say I seem very relaxed, very easy, not at all rule-driven. I don't know about that! Fully 95% of the time I am listening, wrinkle-by-wrinkle. I need all of myself, just to listen; just to stay plain and simple. Yet in a sense this is wonderfully easy, wonderfully peaceful. I am leaning into the flow of listening, letting myself trust you to find your own way. It is your life.

What of the other 5%?

It is so hard to stay fresh, to break free of every formula!

*Apples fall when they are ripe.
An apple falls into my hand,
and my hand is open to gather it.*

In the open space of listening, I may say anything at all which seems likely to be helpful, or just because I feel like it. Our encounter must be safe. So long as I am truly listening, it is typically very safe and very gentle. It must also be alive!

I am always safe, when you respond to me with the whole of your being, when you listen with your heart. And I need you to be alive! I do know when you're off-key! Sometimes I wince or protest. Or perhaps you hear something sour?

Then I go back to listening.

3.) BALA and PAULA: *Is it that in your evolution of Focusing you've come to a point where it's just woven: Listening is woven in — 'being with' is woven in?*

ROB: I like this very much. The image of a weaving-in. I always wanted Listening (and Focusing too!) to be woven into the fabric of my life. That is important to me. I might say, "That is my faith."

Joyce and I were in a shoe shop in Galashiels yesterday, where the woman serving was a little sour. I wondered, "Where can I 'go in' here? How shall I make contact?" I said, "You must get pretty fussy about shoes, working in here?" — "Fussy. Yes. Yes, I do. Fussy. Very very fussy." She smiled. Suddenly I could feel her feeling — "Somebody knows I'm here."

It may be that the word "fussy" fitted more than her relationship with shoes. When a person seizes your word with so much welcome, you may judge you said something right. Many times, I heard Gene Gendlin say, "See! I said something right. I'll say it again!"

Naturally, the new space may open up wherever two or three are gathered together. In a shop, a bedroom or a dental surgery. Why would it not? Frequently, if I say, "What are you into?", it is there in a flash. Still, it is likely a Focusing process will go deeper when other things are set aside; and when the Listener has knowledge and experience of being a companion to Focusing.

For twenty years I struggled to forge an alchemical fusion between my own deep knowing, and what Gene Gendlin actually was with me in person; what he did or showed or passed on, or heard or felt or saw or was open to in me (even it seems I was there "to teach him a new world"), in a fairly small number of life-changing sessions in the years 1988-1991. I am profoundly thankful to have had immediate access to Gene's unmistakable genius as a listener, and his direct personal transmission of the person-centred lineage of Carl Rogers. It is shockingly easy to miss Carl's essential insight, and fall unknowingly to the side. Here is Gene Gendlin on Carl Rogers:

Rogers discovered that a self-propelled process arises from inside... When each thing is received utterly as intended, it makes new space inside. Then the steps go deeper and deeper... Blacks, women, gay people and others felt helped... because these therapists knew that every client had to teach them a new world... To learn this... requires some years of practice... but academic education does not help... I am glad that Carl heard me say these good things. [my emphasis]

I call the self-propelled process “experiential search”. It seems most odd that we have had no name for this before. Having the name, I can frame a question: how is experiential search woven in to the fabric of my life? Well, for many years, I have kept myself busy with four kinds of person-centred, Focusing-oriented practice:

1. carrying forward the grassroots tradition of *peer-counselling* from which we came;
2. teaching the *essential principles* of our practice to musicians, artists, writers, actors and counsellors, and to young people heading for these and other trades;
3. the project of *weaving in*, which is about being vividly open to life in all its small interstices and intersections; and
4. finding new forms — of *spiritual accompaniment*, and of *life-coaching* — which are about learning, from each new person, a new world.

My work, like my life, is about seeing things as we see them and adding nothing (“flying as the hawk flies”) and is driven by a passionate love for justice.

And here for the sake of sincerity I record one searing failure: that I so seldom found any way to come alongside my father, Bob, to weave our lives together into relational depth. It is a great sadness. And now he is gone.

Yet always for me, weaving-in has been the heart of it all, a deep, central practice, something which makes it possible for life in the world to become a spiritual existence of poignancy and depth, with a power to transform us and to free us to act. I hope I may have given you, my reader, some flavour of that weaving-in, of the possible ubiquity of experiential search. Is it not this, rather than piano-playing itself, which is the thing I love to do, that draws the waters of my life naturally into one flow, and saves me from digging up the dead?

4.) BALA and PAULA: *Is it that piano and creativity are a form of Focusing? — that is, without the normal structure?*

ROB: I am sure, whenever a person is doing the thing they love, that a kind of Focusing must arise naturally. You have a relationship with the bowl you are carving. You see the image latent in the stone, as Michelangelo says.

I just had a jacket made. Very extravagant. Very gorgeous. I went to thank the maker. I could feel the love in her craftswomanship. As I was saying “thank you” I was aware that she was touching, in a quick, shy way, as a blue-collar worker sometimes will, a lovely sense of meaning, of everything which it adds to her life to be making something of beauty, which will do its job well and bring lasting joy to another.

Writing too calls forth a form of Focusing. The main part of this writing is an instance, both of doing the thing you love, and of a Focusing process. Borrowing a phrase from Gene Gendlin, I might call it “an instance of itself”. I wrote without notes in a single Focusing writing session of about ten hours, letting the text grow organically under me.

I felt like the Wedding-Guest in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge's great ballad about the wild authority of the call to prophecy or poetry: about the sheer loneliness of the creative moment — "*Oh Wedding-Guest, my soul hath been / Alone on a wide, wide sea*" — the sea of clear vision or bad conscience, of unconscious imagery breaking over the little ship of daily sanity.

The Rime is haunted by slavery and empire, by guilt and complicity, shame and remorse. Though I have written here only from a personal point of view, I should be sorry if you thought me unaware that the higher forms of active love are for things like truth, justice and mercy; for simplicity, being and self-knowledge; for friendship, compassion and non-violence. Especially we must love that sense of truth which leads directly to a love for justice, justice to the oppressed and solidarity with the beleaguered. These higher loves and loyalties are as urgent now as in 1795 when Coleridge was crying out against the slavers of Bristol.

Near the end of his life, Socrates asked whether what is right is right merely because the gods love it. Or do the gods love it because it is right? For us, the issue is whether an action is right, simply because WE love it. I am certain (as certain even as Plato) that the answer is "No".⁹ As we sit here watching the suicide of humanity, you may well ask whether what I have written has anything to offer in the face of tragedy.

All I can say is, I have tried to write the little piece I know. I know that there is no wealth but life. I know that love is the core of life. And I know that good things happen, when you are doing the thing you love.¹⁰

... She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

– Virginia Woolf, in closing *To the Lighthouse*¹¹

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1a. 8th June 2008. Today I had a letter from my dear friend Bala Jaison. She wrote: "*Life is so complicated. I have worked so hard to train myself not to react to anything, until I have all the facts. Not always easy to do, but I try.*" As I sat with these words, this writing began to roam about my mind, in a series of stirrings. It is a response to Bala, though in no obvious sense, and I should like to dedicate it to her.
- 1b. I thank Bebe Simon, Kathy McGuire-Bouwman and Suzanne Noel for precious solidarity, not least in the process of writing. Suzanne is uneasy about the word "thing". Of course. Still, if I took it out I'd have to start over.
- 1c. My thoughts owe much to the marvellous reflections of Harry Frankfurt (in *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton, 2004).

2. W B Yeats: He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.
Sappho: Poem 16 in David Campbell's text (Loeb series: *Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
3. I would like to thank, but not to name, the woman who wanted not to be "hippy-dippy". I admire her flair for words, her ear for a turn of phrase.
4. For Anna Paskevaska, see www.paskevaska.com/cv.html.
5. *Liebst du um Schönheit* (1902) is the fifth of Gustav Mahler's *Fünf Lieder nach Rückert* (*Five Rückert Songs*).
6. "... too finely wrought for words to be their medium". In a famous story, Mendelssohn says, "The reason why we cannot say what music means is not at all that music is vague. The meaning of music is in fact far more precise than the meaning of words, and that is why we cannot put it into words."
7. *Ethics Prop. 4.52, scholium*. In Spinoza: *Complete Works*. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 2002. Cited in Harry Frankfurt, op cit.
- 8a. In the following passage, I owe the invaluable phrase "relational depth" to Dave Mearns, and the image of "the miner's canary" to Ann Weiser Cornell.
- 8b. The integrated model of Focusing and Listening which follows is my own (see also www.robfoxcroft.com and www.robfoxcroft.com/blog). It is closely consonant with my experience of Gene Gendlin, and his writings, e g:
 - Gendlin, E.T. (1988) Carl Rogers (1902-1987). In *American Psychologist*, (43) 2. 127-128), from which I have quoted in this article.
 - Gendlin, E.T. (1990). The small steps of the therapy process: How they come and how to help them come. In G. Lietaer, J. Rombauts and R. Van Balen (Eds.), *Client-centered and experiential psychotherapy in the nineties*, pp. 205-224. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
 - Gendlin, E.T. (1997). *A process model*. New York: The Focusing Institute, esp. pages 220-225 and 241-245.
9. Plato, *Euthyphro* [12A] (freely translated).
10. "There is no wealth but life": Ruskin, John (1860). *Unto This Last*. Reprinted in *Unto this last and other writings*. Penguin Classics (1987).
11. Virginia Woolf — see <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100101.txt>

