

Wordlessness

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“There are Buddha-lands where there are no words. In some Buddha-lands ideas are indicated by looking steadily, in others by gestures, in still others by a frown, by a movement of the eyes, by laughing, by yawning, by the clearing of the throat, or by trembling.”

Lankavatara Sutra

Worldless Reality

These beautiful words touch the possibility of the wordless. Wordless reality. Is there such a thing? For ants, lions and snakes there is. They get along very well without words, as does most of physical and biological reality. Yet a case can be made for nonverbal language, chemical signals, bird songs, buzzing of bees, varying “roars” of the lion. Are these, properly speaking, words? Words can make up meanings that refer to things that are not there or do not exist. The Lankavatara Sutra gives as examples, “hare’s horns” or “a barren woman’s child”, words without objects. Animal signals seem to be confined (we think) to what is there or could be there, concerns with pain, pleasure, territory, mating, grief, nutriment, danger, perhaps even songs and gasps expressing awesome surges of beauty.

Some of us argue that words pervade everything. In the beginning was the Word, the creative Word, generator of the kind of life we have and can have. We

are born into language. Our body is a language, many languages, and words imprint it. There are many ways to formulate an intimacy between words and life and rupture between words and life. Yet the value of wordless experience has been affirmed since the beginning of recorded words. Is wordless experience possible with the advent of verbal language? Whether or not it is, it continues to be valued, cared for, mined, touched. One of the great functions of poetry is to find (and create) the thrill of the wordless through words.

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The passage from the Lankavatara Sutra quoted above (Goddard, 1932, p. 42) speaks of “ideas indicated” by gestures. We are not going to solve or exhaustively study what this might mean (if the passage is tolerably translated). We will play with it a little. If one takes the passage at face value, physical movements indicate ideas. Physical movements have meaning or are not without meaning. This is linked with Buddhist emphasis on mind. Our minds constitute the world we live or the way we live in it, and our minds can be transcended.

There is smaller and larger mind, psychophysical and spiritual reality. More dramatically, in the very next sentence, the Lankavatara tells us there are Buddha-lands “transcending words and ideas, ” one attains ”recognition of all things as un-born.”

If we were cognitive therapists, we might emphasize ways that ideas and attitudes, especially affective attitudes, shape experience-behavior. Ideas imprint body. As a psychoanalyst, I like to say affective attitudes mold body and vice versa.

Herbert Read (1957) suggests that image precedes idea by about two hundred years. And before image? Physical gropings, some push from within, experiential pressures, perhaps with a sense of implicit meanings aching for birth. The permanently unborn, aching for birth, giving birth in great variety.

Physical ↔ Mental. When we penetrate either side, we find the other. They are intertwined, one-yet-not-one, not-one-yet-one, a paradoxical monism (Eigen, 2009a; 1998). We make discriminations like mind-body, without knowing what these names buzz around.

It is like going into a cave and coming out in Wonderland. Or discovering Wonderland, then dropping into shit forever. Alchemists express a fundamental, teleological urge when they try to turn shit into gold. And accidents of language bring us up short with reversible formations like God ↔ dog. Binaries just don't do processes justice, but we lack language and ability to do without them. We try with computer programs on the one hand, and art and poetry on the other, to express amazing, complex patternings with lives of their own.

We are multitudes of unknown patternings in process, and our minds use concepts as ladles to get a fix on them. Slowly we learn that conceptual ladles inform us about ways mind tries to organize reality, ways that mind strains against its limits. And we? It is not unusual to feel boxed in by our minds, our habits, attitudes, sense of self. In older language, we try to push through the prison of ourselves. We try to get out of ourselves, out of our mind.

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Some struggle to get into or out of words. The idea of putting feelings into words is an odd locution. How does one do that? Can you picture it? Sometimes I think of drawing feelings from a well and pouring them, a little at a time, into buckets of words. Often we do the reverse. We try to fill the well with words. Instead of drawing from a deep and bottomless well, we pour words into it. We lower word buckets down, hoping to catch something, often coming up with more words. Some of these words are juicy enough, some dry. But we fear that what we pull up is what we put in, missing living water.

Winnicott calls attention to difficulties wordless people have in a world of words.

“Some babies specialise in thinking, and reach out for words; others specialise in auditory, visual, or other sensuous experience, and in memories and creative imagination of a hallucinatory kind, and these latter may not reach out for words. There is no question of the one being normal and the other abnormal. Misunderstandings may occur in debate through the fact that one person talking belongs to the thinking and verbalising kind, while another belongs to the kind that hallucinates in the visual and auditory field instead of expressing the self in words. Somehow the word people tend to claim sanity, and those who see visions do not know how to defend their positions when accused of insanity. Logical argument really belongs to the verbalisers. Feeling or a feeling of certainty or truth or “real” belong to the others.” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 155)

Differences in sensibility can lead to value judgments about the worth of others, including opinions and definitions of what is real. One source of rancor between people can be rooted in ways they process experience. One can over or undervalue word, vision, action. Labyrinths of misrecognitions perpetuate themselves in belief systems. When I read a passage like Winnicott's, I feel we are struggling to develop a democracy of voices, a democracy of sensibilities. Winnicott valorizes modes of experiencing and processing experience that are often felt to be mutually exclusive, at war, as if threads of psychic life tyrannize each other. A dominance model goes only so far. A partnership model, emphasizing co-nourishing capacities, needs more room. There are ways, too, that conflict is part of partnership.

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I have heard it proposed that silence is needed to process affects. If one talks all the time, one may make discoveries but fail to digest them. They remain momentary flashes. Perhaps someone having such a flash can bring it to fruition. Perhaps a moment's flash, then another, and another, is enough. But quiet time is needed to let the flash sink in.

In therapy sessions, I've seen people talk so much they do not hear what they are saying, they do not let it sink in. They speed past the emotional depths of their communications, as if speaking is enough. So many things happen in the speaking. One gets back at others, voices injuries, confesses guilt. Yet in the speak mode nothing more may be done, as if saying it is enough, saying it dilutes or gets rid of it or diminishes it enough for the time being.

Letting something sink in and be part of one is something else, something more. Words are an avenue, a conduit, but at a certain point, wordless processing takes over. One is affected through and through but there is a point where the affected self disappears from view. Wordless, imageless being is all that's left. Processing and digestion goes on outside of awareness. The duality being and non-being loses valence, as does the distinction between duality/non-duality.

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In late 19th and early 20th century, psychologists investigated consciousness in a number of ways. Areas of interest included judgment and problem solving. Some investigators began to find that at a certain point, usual contents of consciousness faded. Subjects might become hesitant, at a loss, and approach a blank, contentless state, a still point some described as “impalpable awareness.” Sometimes a solution to a problem came out of this state, what we might call “out of the blue.”

This is not an unusual phenomenon. Gestalt psychology describes moments of impasse, becoming lost in immersion, an imageless, thoughtless absorption, preceding sudden seeing of relations unperceived before, insight into the structure of a situation. In my book, *Flames from the Unconscious: Trauma, Madness and Faith* (2009b), I bring out moments of Wittgenstein's and Buddha's experience of deep immersion which open something like psychic wormholes which bring one to new places, experiences valuable in their own right.

Wittgenstein's descriptions of suffering guilt and finding a still point at the bottom of the sea link with Buddha's descriptions of suffering life and awakening. When I read accounts of "impalpable awareness" in graduate school, I felt relief to see academic psychologists come upon states they had no categories for, states that could not be described by sensory content, judgment, thought, image, or will. In 1901, Mayer and Orth and then Marbe (G. Humphrey, 1948) called various mental events that eluded known categories, *bewusstseinslage*, variously translated as awareness of, knowing that, consciousness or consciousness of, states of consciousness. It could be a kind of intuitive sense of a whole without any clear awareness of details. Or a blank state, a compressed moment, something I might call awarenesses without readily graspable content, sometimes maybe like a hunch or pressure, and sometimes just open and free. Perhaps something like pure awareness, awareness as such.

These states were difficult to describe or beyond description, unknowns. As if consciousness or awareness has a kind of unknown core or that unknowing is one of its "nuclei". The major workers who called attention to this indescribable awareness were part of what was called the Wurzburg school. Their work all but disappeared from the fads and fashions of psychology as it developed but has resonance with certain threads of work today.

Blank consciousness often is associated with psychic depletion, trauma or psychosis, an impoverishment of psychic capacity (Fliess, 1971). But there is generative blankness as well. I remember a very talkative, angry, stormy patient, Lynn, whom I wrote about in *Reshaping the Self* (1995). At one point, she

experienced a sequence of feelings without apparent reason. A flow without thought or image content. I suggested she try to focus on the feelings themselves and just keeping feeling, without trying to figure out why or what, no judgments or interpretations. Stick with the thing itself, as best as possible.

It was like riding bareback without reins. She and the horse had to trust each other. We worked some time before this happened, so a good deal of therapy faith had chance to develop or this kind of psychic hand holding would not have held. On this occasion, a kind of grace, she let the feelings build and go where they would and stayed with ebbs and flows, now stronger, weaker, fading, returning, like variable volume on a tuner setting itself moment to moment.

In *Reshaping the Self* (1995, pp. 120-123), I spoke of “a wordless self”. Self would come, self would go, “self-feeling” waxed and waned. The term sensation is usually reserved for experiences of color, pleasure, pain, tone, numbness, tingling, etc. It is often distinguished from emotion and feeling. But I find that the latter can be felt, at least partly, as a kind of sensation too. A feeling sensation. This may include self or no-self sensations, God or no-God sensations, as well as a sensing of a gamut of emotions and dimensions such as empty-full (of life, feeling, lack of feeling) Freud touches this when he calls consciousness a “sense organ” enabling perception of psychical qualities (1900, *SE 4*, p. 51). What kind of sensations are feelings, what kind of sense organ is consciousness?

The first glimmer of Lynn going blank was after she recounted a stormy time with her mother that for years left her not wanting to be a mother. It could

have been tempting to interpret the blankness as a response to or defense against trauma, a clamming up in face of the unbearable. But that's not what the silent room felt like. There are many kinds of silence and one senses differences. Instead of interpreting in usual ways, I held back and the blankness became a kind of sea or reservoir, positive in itself, a peaceful, refreshing blankness, although it alternated with muted anxiety (1995, p. 73): "Lynn experienced a fuller sense of what she went through growing up and for some moments was able to relax deeply. Her blankness was alive and resonant before she began to break apart again. For the moment her need to be in control dropped away. On her way out [at the end of the session], Lynn remarked she felt less 'thin.'"

Lynn was a regular person trying to live a regular life. Moments of creative stillness are not a prerogative of a creative elite. They are part and parcel of existence, a capacity many have but might not fully tap. It is not so unusual for people to speak of the value of still moments, if given the chance. Some of the most beautiful life experiences involve stillness. Once in meditation, the words came to me, "unknown intimacies." These words meant intimacies with myself, indescribable and priceless, but not limited to myself. Bion speaks of psychoanalysis as introducing the patient to herself. Such introductions involve history and cognition, but that scarcely taps the profound introduction to the unknown infinite. An infinite that, for Bion, has a psychic primacy.

Many creative geniuses speak of silence, stillness and related states, often as part of concentration, brewing, intuition, inspiration, or perhaps part of a

prolonged impasse. Einstein said he often thought in fragments of images and vague body states, later translating his body “feels” into mathematical and scientific terms. Mozart wrote of a flash, often after a good meal, when he would “hear” or “see” a work all at once without knowing the details. The flash had a certain impalpable feel. These and a rich variety of descriptions of creative moments and processes can be found in Ghiselin (1952)

The flash Mozart describes reminds me of the white flash of *Chochma* in the Sephirot in Kabala. The Kabala tree has a series of spiritual energy points or psychic organizers that flow from the unknown infinite through Chochma (wisdom) down through other channels (understanding, mercy, judgment...action). The flow is both ways, up-down/down-up. Chochma is often described as a flash of white light refracting all psychospiritual colors that make us up and that we partner. If Adam’s job was to tend the garden, ours is to tend the garden of soul, our beings, all the amazing capacities we find as we live.

Marion Milner (1957, 1987) translates the spiritual to the psychological, exploring flows from up-down/down-up that she frames as consciousness moving into body, body moving into consciousness. Perhaps it is more accurate to say she tends to dissolve artificial dissociations between dualities such as psychological and spiritual, consciousness and body. Dualities break down once you get into details of processes: what is body and consciousness become indistinguishable at certain points. She has many passages linking creativity and silent, ungraspable work in areas of formlessness, elusive to objectifying modes of functioning. States in which physical, psychic and spiritual awareness work

together in interwoven ways. I have written in several places that sensation is ineffable (e.g., 2006), a realization with which I think Milner would agree. She approvingly quotes the poets Thomas Traherne saying that perception is a form of imagination and William Blake saying that perception is infinite.

More Bion

“The fundamental reality is ‘infinity’, the unknown, the situation for which there is no language – not even one borrowed by the artist or the religious – which gets anywhere near to describing it.”

W. R. Bion, Cogitations, p. 372

The fundamental reality – wordless unknown infinity. No language gets near – anywhere near. Quite an assertion. A strong assertion. Is it an assertion or a confession, an expression of emotional experience, for Bion a fundamental experience? I suspect he is letting us in on a truth about his fundamental experience of life. His words carry not only conviction but reality for me, whatever they mean. I am assuming this statement as background for whatever I write about Bion, although I am moving into other filaments of his thought.

In the nexus of his work, Bion coins the term *alpha function*, and means by it processes that store and digest (or try to digest) emotional experience. As yet unstored and undigested impacts of experience he names *beta elements*. I sometimes describe the latter as impact globs awaiting psychic metabolizing. He calls these impact globs “sensations,” but they are not exactly the same as sensations of red or loud noise or body thrills, although they may overlap. They are often catastrophic sensations or bits of catastrophe, or intimations of catastrophe. A core catastrophe he has in mind is decimation of the personality,

personal catastrophe. One's very personhood is hit, traumatically challenged. He points to what I'd like to call a *catastrophic sense*, a *sense* of catastrophe.

Needless to say, a catastrophic sense has a basis in catastrophes that happen in the world we live in, physical and social. Physical blights, wars, economic upheavals, arrays of physical, social and personal wounds, failure of functioning and the fact of death all feed our sense of disaster (Eigen, 1996, Chapter 16, "Disaster Anxiety"). It is a sense that gets transferred to and perhaps has roots in the threat of being abandoned by someone one loves or being exploited, misused, abused, suffocated in the attempt to live or live well.

For Bion, the very advent of consciousness, the psyche we have, has a catastrophic element, as if our somaticpsychic being is challenged to support the mind it gives birth to. As if experiencing is too much for the systems we have, too intense, too painful, too vast and fast. Evolution is uneven, producing experiences but not adequate digestive capacities for them, another instance in which production outstrips assimilation, a variation of the unevenness Pascal noticed, always ahead of and behind ourselves.

It belies common sense to think our experience is basically catastrophic. So much in life is good. In the first book of the Bible, God is pleased with his production and feels it basically good. There have been times in my life when I felt it good even in hell. *Jouissance* runs through it, even a *jouissance* of death. Bion's work, however, functions as a marker, a notation, calling attention to a catastrophic sense that is pervasive, that is one of the elements that knits personality together. To overlook the claims of our sense of catastrophe is itself

catastrophic.

What is real knocks on doors of our defenses and, if it must, knocks them over, forcing reality upon us. We shut reality out more or less successfully a good deal of the time, and let it in a good deal of the time in well parsed doses. Shutting out and letting in work together, a kind of balance, enabling us to work with what we can as well as we can. But either tendency can go haywire. If shutting out gains the upper hand too much, too long, reality has to work harder to be noticed, realized. A range of catastrophic events may result, including social and personal warps. Trauma rocks through personality, mind, and society. Helpful inroads on any part of the mix is a start.

Bion's alpha function is meant as an inroad. I attended his seminars in New York City in 1978 when someone asked him, "Why do you create this term, alpha function? Don't we have terms that describe what you mean – primary process, secondary process, others?" Bion responded, "I create a term that has no meaning, a kind of nest where birds of meaning might alight." He wants a fresh start, a new beginning, or, at least, the possibility of a fresh look at how we relate to who we are and what life is. Implicit is the question, "Do we really know what grips us or how? How do we let things in? How do we let our own life in? How do we process and make part of us the reality of our own existence?" The 'how' here is not meant mechanistically, but more to stimulate awareness of our reality, our condition, and especially the constitution, organization and movements of emotional nuclei, basic responses to ourselves, to life. The primary "sensations" that need processing are emotional sensations.

Alpha works in many ways, including physical ways. An example of the latter are moments when a ball player makes a terrific catch, a dancer an amazing move, surprising even himself. I'd like to call this flow and rise of power, as if a channel opens, alpha body. Another day or even minutes later, the same player will miss a catch and the dancer feels his legs are cement: beta body. Bion has many passages on body experience and communication, often with an implicit sense that different organ systems have minds of their own (e.g., gut mind, breath mind, sex mind) and that overly dualistic oppositions of body/mind miss realities at stake.

Bion notes that analytic thinking (e.g., Euclidean geometry) and narrative (e.g., dream, myth) can be part of alpha work, but he seems more interested in a third kind of alpha that he does not name. He likens it to reversible perspective and the appearing-disappearing of dream memories (1992, pp. 223-4). Now it is one thing, now another, now it is here, now not. He links this form of alpha, too, with interplay of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, alternations of coherence, incoherence. In one passage he hints at it this way: "alpha-elements cohere, separate, cohere again, separate again, converge, diverge, and so on. It is an experience in which coherence and separation are never observed; at one moment the alpha-elements are coherent and then they are incoherent." (ibid). To say that this alternation is unobserved implies a kind of faith and suggests that what appears as alternation to discriminating awareness may be part of one underlying structure or movement.

In earlier work (1986, Chapter 4; 1992, 1993, 1995, 2009a), I posited a

distinction-union structure, a double tendency in which psychic movements towards distinction and towards union constitute aspects of one structure, a kind of DNA/RNA in every unit of experience. This touches on the kind of alpha work Bion likens to double or reversible perspectives. In several books (1986, 1992, 1995), I traced the work of distinction-union tendencies in clinical work. To see these tendencies with their interweaving and dissociations as currents of a deeper structure adds a degree of richness and wisdom to moment to moment awareness.

Since Bion did not name the kind of alpha we are pointing to here, yet thought it highly significant, I will call it “on-off alpha” as a kind of working notation. It includes the now you see it now you don’t, now it’s one way, now another quality of experience. I am assuming phenomenological doubleness has unobserved, intricate interweavings, even oneness (there may be many qualities of oneness). This “structure” or “movement” or “state of affairs” has wide application. For example, self/no-self, God/no-God, mind/no-mind, being/non-being, full/empty, distinction/union, samsara/nirvana, attention/no-attention, words/wordless.

Bion touches on a mode of processing that is part of creative work and failure to make room for it contributes to being trapped by false choices and divisions which can degenerate into war between capacities. Cultural history is replete with wars between thinking and feeling, feeling and sensation, one capacity pitted against another in a struggle for primacy. Lopsided struggles to be on top of a hierarchy foreclose awareness of symbiotic interplay, a situation

of mutual support and nourishment. It is a situation characteristic of capacities within a single personality and between groups, temperaments and interests in the larger world. Virtually any capacity can function in an alpha and/or beta way, and in anti-alpha ways that damage alpha. The same capacity varies depending on its use, value and work in a given situation.

Alpha work may be difficult and, in Bion's terms, require suffering experience, including tragic qualities and structures of experience. But too great occlusion of alpha, whether out of need, inertia, or meanness, risks cutting oneself off from vital qualities necessary for existence. The struggle to survive via dominance can become counter-productive. The will to be on top becomes myopic, skewing awareness of larger, contextual realities, e.g., undervaluing caring, affiliative tendencies. On-off alpha tries to process both tendencies, since dominance and cooperative caring are parts of larger realities. Look at one, see the other, two attitudes that characterize social life.

How does alpha work? That is a question Bion keeps open by coining a term like alpha. He gives some hints about methodology. He calls the psychoanalytic attitude Faith and describes it as being without memory, understanding, expectation or desire. An attitude of openness, allied to waiting, stillness, requiring patience. He lays it down as an evolutionary challenge, a capacity we need in face of what we do to ourselves in economic, military, familial, social struggle.

Religious myths and the earliest accounts of history tell us we are menaces to ourselves. Biblical prophets, like many other sages, envision the lion

lying down with the lamb, turning swords into ploughs, or as the prophet Micha puts it, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." Their voices try to inject a stream of caring through the social body, where aggressive self-centered tendencies vie with broader co-operative needs. Recognition of both tendencies has a long history.

Murder has been an integral part of social life and, to this moment, we do not know what to do with our murderous beings. The prophets fear the destructive consequences of failure to temper our Numero Uno dispositions. I used to joke that the meek will inherit the earth after the strong kill themselves off. However, things are never so simple. In spite of slaughter in times past, we could not do as much harm to ourselves as we can now, when all parts of the globe affect each other. The amazing systems we have for transmission of information and goods expose us all to each other's schemes, visions, doings. Some see dominance as a mainspring of survival, others say, give cooperation a chance. We will never stimulate growth of the latter capacity if we do not use it. Like a physical muscle, psychic capacities develop through quality of use.

Similarly, what Bion calls faith, the psychoanalytic attitude, being without memory, expectation, understanding and desire. An impossibility? A necessity? As the Talmud says, we may not complete the task, but we can begin it. Does such an attitude as Bion describes exist? Is it worth cultivating? Practice and see. If Hamlet had truly waited and not simply feigned indecision, he might have broken through the revenge ethic. He might have broken murderous trans-generational chains of transmissions. Can we?

Another thread in Bion's work is Transformations in O, where O is a notation for ultimate reality or perhaps, simply, reality. Reality is a big word and a bigger reality. Reality is everywhere you look. You are reality. It is an amazing gift of the human mind that it can think of being out of reality. It can null reality and feel unreal. We can feel unreal and be tormented by living unreal lives. Since there is no way to be unreal, to step out of reality, our unreal lives and its torment are real too. We are the stunning creature who can be real/unreal – and we are really both.

A patient came to me and after time together confessed she felt unreal. Not totally unreal, but like a sliver of light in her chest reaching into to her belly, a kind of unreal slit in her being. She doesn't remember when it got there or when she became aware of it. It became worse in her marriage because she felt life should be real - raising a family, living with a loving man, having her own work. She expected me to talk her out of her sense of unreality, make it go away. She pictured therapy as the two of us allied against her unreality, find causes and ameliorate them, turn her into a real person.

She wanted to hear that her sense of unreality was unreal and we could do something about it. Whether or not her wish can come true in the long run, for the moment something in me took the form of validating the realness of her sense of unreality and I found myself saying something like, "What about just feeling it? Just be with it. Maybe taste it, take a look at it, see if it says anything, goes anywhere. Maybe you need time to hang with it, care for it, give it room."

That was not anything anyone ever told her. She was accustomed to

running from it, filling it with diversions, shopping, child and house care, details of work, angry flare ups at her husband, a lot of activity. To make time to feel unreal was counter-intuitive. I was telling her to do what she feared to do, what she could not do. Yet the idea appealed to her, took her off guard, intrigued her. Perhaps a beginning was not too far away, but it was not any kind of beginning she had pictured.

Were my words part of on-off alpha? A null response to what she posited and presented? I think of Beckett sentences that posit something at the beginning and null it at the end. To posit-null is a widespread activity on every level, thought, talk, history. Hinduism says Atman is Brahman (I and God are one). Buddhism says why I? Why God? Another field of experience opens. Nulling is creative. Going beyond positing and nulling is creative.

Words were involved with my patient. That's the kind of therapy I do, talk therapy. But there were wordless transmissions. An affective attitude was instantaneously transmitted, new for the patient, a sense of making room, staying with, enduring and passing through the taboo against being empty. Word components were important but wordless sensing more so, as an inner barrier began to lift.

Inner sensing might be likened to "inklings", intimations, "feels", overlapping with "unknown intimacies". But the null function can wipe away even these, wipe away even the freeing sense that arises when all is wiped out. What bliss! And even that...

How far can we reach? What can one say about Transformations in O?

Bion talked and wrote a lot, so does not play down words. Yet words – whatever else they are – are gateways to the wordless. Bion speaks of a “felt need” in us for unconscious processing, including a need to convert conscious experience into dream, a need often “obscured by the analyst’s insistence on interpretation of the dream.” (1992, p. 184) This is not yet imageless transformation, but it is on the way. There is a Hindu saying that calls what is happening in waking life right now the past, dream life the present, and imageless void the future. Even in dreams there are holes, openings, caesuras, blank spots, the thrill of void.

So much transformational work goes on in reality deeper than dream. Now and then we get inklings of this transformational work, hunches, intimations that bubble up into consciousness as fear, appreciation or questions. In a way, Bion sees verbal thought and statements as questions (1992, p. 190-1; 192-7). Words are existential questions. They express experiences that echo on all levels of our beings, whether in the form of silence, waiting, hearing God in the stillness, tasting our own realness in hidden or less hidden ways, expressions of awe, generosity or thoughtful scrutiny from poetry to math. Our life is a question to life. Also, an exclamation point!

Bion speaks of the analytic session as a special time and goes so far as to call it “the only time when I can have contact with what I do not know” (1992, p. 214). Contact with what is not known is the ground of the session, a sense that runs through it that supports what is said and talked about. That the session by its reality models contact with what is not known may be a source of fear of psychoanalysis. There is so much pressure in public life to act as if one knows

more than one does, or even believe one knows what one thinks one knows. An enterprise like psychoanalysis, grounded in unknowing, seems an odd beast indeed.

Psychoanalysis turns things upside down, grounding itself in what is not known, resisting the pull of certainty or fancying one knows more than one does. With various strokes of his brush, Bion links Socratic ignorance, faith as a gesture towards the unknowable, and various eastern and western moments of opening. F in O links with T in O. Wordless, imageless faith in unknowable reality and wordless, imageless transformations that go on in reality. The various systems of thought, social life, orientations and belief grow like arrays of colorful animals and flowers from largely creative processes we know or suspect we know or imagine we know bits of. One translation of Ayin Soph, the infinite unknown God of Kabbalah, might be infinite nothing. A song that ends many Jewish services says of God, "there is none else," there is nothing but God. This nothing which we sometimes think of as creativity itself (without reaching towards distinctions between creation and destruction) remains a mystery. We try to water reality down to make it handle able. But some of us, some of the time, and some of us more of the time, develop a taste for the mystery itself and all that reality does without our knowing. How do we appreciate it without capacity to know? By that special sense no one has yet exhausted and that has called so many forms of expression into being as testimony, as partner, to share and take forward

Faith is rooted in the unknown, if it can be said to have roots. Whether an

unknowable God or a state of affairs ever receding from the knowledge quest. Buddhism claims experience of ultimate reality, a kind of knowledge allied with wisdom. In psychoanalysis this experience beyond experience is real too. Faith, also, is a theme in Buddhist literature, whether a methodological faith that keeps the practitioner on a path yet to be discovered and fully lived, or in the goal region itself, which links with an attitude of sincerity, compassion, a faith-ful life. There is a state where K and F are not distinguishable, at once co-nourishing and coincident. In everyday life they balance and question and stimulate each other, although dissociated extremes can wreak social and personal havoc. There are, also, states that nothing can describe, that faith and knowing touch, brush, taste, then throw up their hands, stop being tortured and torturing, and let wordless work go on by itself.

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