



The Uninvited Guest

Simon W Davison

The uninvited guest refers to that which is unknown and yet ever present. It represents all that is possible, hopeful, new and alive. It also elicits fear, uneasiness, rejection and vulnerability. If we are to realise our evolutionary potential as human beings, we need to establish a healthy relationship to the unknown and allow it to participate in our learning and decision making processes. What follows is a practical example of the conceptual and living architecture needed to facilitate the integration of this understanding. This material was introduced into a seminar on 'Care' held at Yale University during the fall of 2007 and is the foundation for development of new conceptual frameworks that encourage sustainable values based alternative approaches to social, environmental, political and economic issues.

When the seminar on 'Care' was created it was seen as important that the academic learning process was interspersed with, and supported by, periods of self reflection and integration with subjective experience. The intention was to create an environment for course participants that illuminated a different learning dynamic that invited their own humanity to participate in the process. Establishing an open, non judgmental, sharing, caring context was crucial in conveying the architecture and components of this dynamic and ensuring the students had a real time living relationship to this teaching.

Therefore it was important to:

- Invite the personal self to participate openly and create the environment for that to happen
- Set out the conceptual architecture of this living learning dynamic
- Highlight attitudes and aspects that would enliven the architecture
- Understand how this could be integrated and applied

Establishing the relational environment

The relational environment was established by inviting all participants (including course faculty) to agree to share what was real in them and agree to hold this in trust with each other and respect confidentiality. This mutual trust was built on during the course through simple exercises and encouraging communication. For example permission to 'get it wrong' and 'anything will do as long as it is true' became fertile ground along with regular 'feeling checks' where participants spoke freely about their concerns and feelings.

Setting out the architecture – The "Uninvited Guest"

The architecture introduced the concept of using what is unknown as an active participant in the process of learning and understanding. This was referred to as the uninvited guest. In the India of the Vedas much thought was given to what sustains a human being and a society and the conditions that foster growth and development of both. Four aspects were seen to provide a sustainable community: mother, cow, father and the uninvited guest. When these are interpreted also as aspects of our own body we have the architecture to alter the conscious template of how we relate, experience and learn. These aspects act like four legs that support us. Take away or weaken any of them and we are impaired in our functioning.



These can be interpreted thus:

- Mother represents the feminine, emotions, caring, inclusivity, the home, maintaining. The water element.
- Cow represents the physical, material body, sustenance. The earth element.
- Father represents the masculine, intellect, reasoning, venturing into the external world. The fire element.
- Uninvited guest represents all that is unknown, spirit. The air element.

The first three are the area of the known and often vie for position with each other in a functioning hierarchy. True receptivity to the fourth leg, the uninvited guest as representing all that is unknown, brings order to the known. All that we know or think that we know is very little when compared with what we do not know. Inviting in the uninvited guest is a way of integrating this truth into our daily lives.

Enlivening the architecture

Though the conceptual architecture is simple its real value is only recognised when we allow it to be enlivened with the living part of ourselves, the truth of who we are. Ironically we usually reject this part as being too disturbing, petty, irrelevant or distracting. Yet at any given moment this rejected truth sums up our humanity. We do not have a choice over what we feel. We do have a choice over how we relate to what we feel. By establishing an honest intimate relationship with our feelings, emotions, notions and self-judgments, we get back in touch with our humanity. With self-loving care, this becomes the doorway to a new dimension that authenticates who we are. In rejecting this doorway we continue to ricochet off the walls of the room of what we already know, seeking solutions resulting in outcomes that are synthetic and inauthentic.

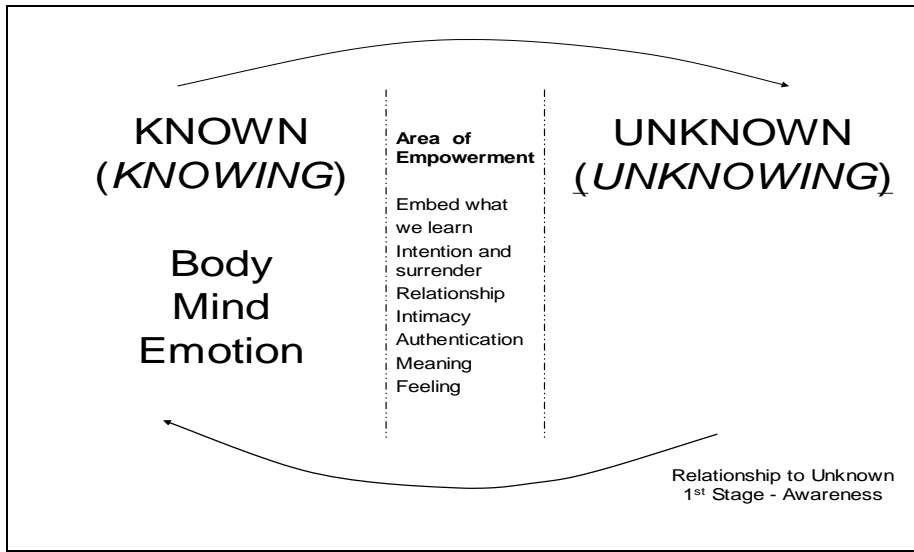
Acceptance of the unknown often means embracing truths about ourselves that we judge as negative such as dependency, pettiness, not being in control, neediness, our perceived limitations and weaknesses. When the triumvirate of the known can relinquish control and be receiving of the unknown, qualities manifest like openness, humility, vulnerability, relatedness, aliveness, and gratitude. These qualities often are not part of our conscious awareness, yet on reflection we can sense they are there and they allow a transformation to take place. A transformation that may be experienced as an expanded consciousness, a profound sense of well being and energy, taking form as insight and understanding, love and compassion.

Integrating and empowerment

Understanding the architecture of the uninvited guest and the aspects that enliven it, is part of a process of self realization that can lead to greater integration and empowerment. Learning is not only acquiring knowledge and applying the power of reason. Learning is also relinquishing control of this knowledge and allowing a living dynamic to participate. Life you cannot cheat, though we can and do cheat ourselves of life. Understanding our integral relationship to life and living opens us to a deeper sensibility that enriches our responses to the challenges that face us. As we become aware and intimate in this relationship we are able to apply conscious intention to our actions centered in our inner self rather than ego. This self has no difficulty in surrendering control whereas ego needs to claim dominance. Ironically, true intention and surrender opens up an area of empowerment (figure 1) between the unknown and the known; unknowing and knowing.



Figure 1 – Awareness



A lot goes on here. It is where we embed what we learn. It is where what is innate in us and what we have acquired crosses over. This is where who we are, what we are and what we know are authenticated. The more we recognize and feel this affirmation, the more we can welcome the rejected pieces of ourselves, the uncertainties, the uncomfortable feelings, as reflections of the unknown and as vehicles that take us back to the truth. We expand the bandwidth of our experience. Over time the relationship of the different parts of ourselves changes as we become more at ease with allowing the unknown to participate. There is increasing integration (figure 2) and blending (figure 3), though the parts remain distinct.

Figure 2 – Integrating

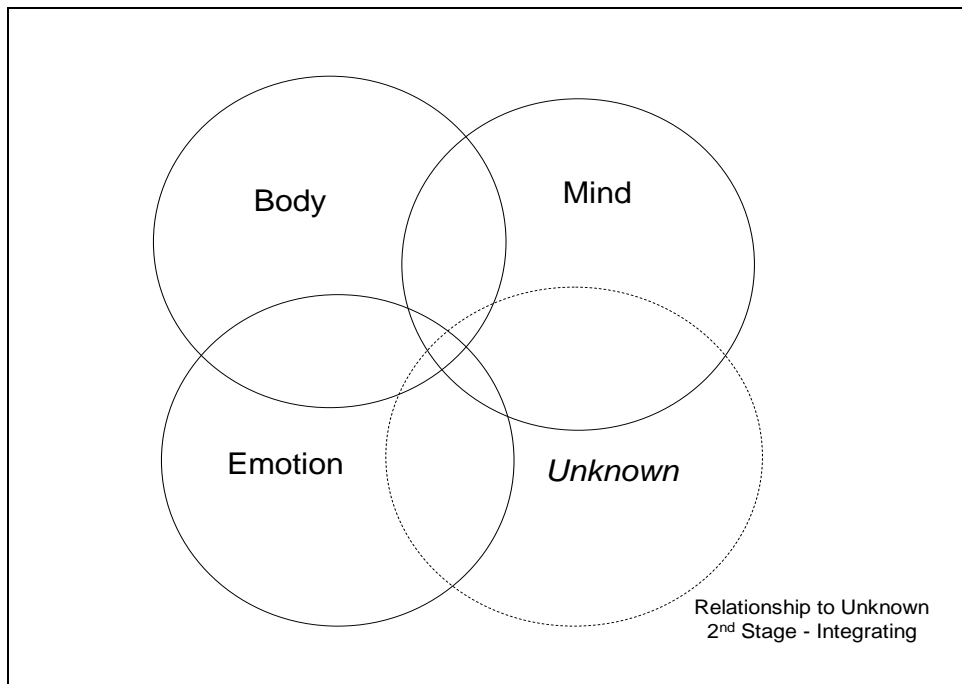
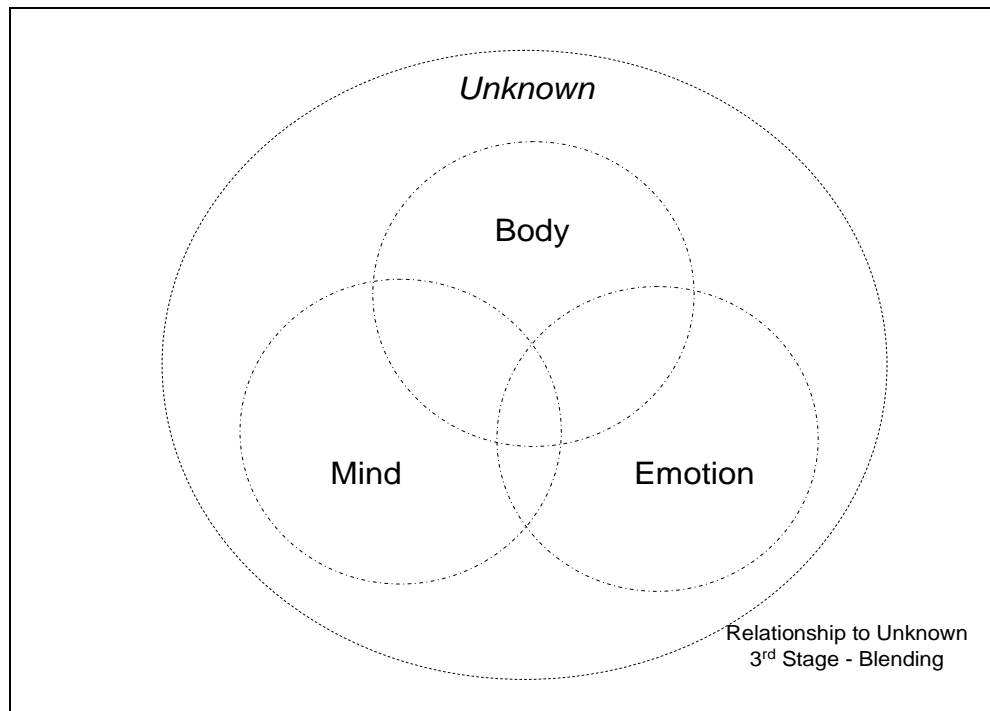




Figure 3 – Blending



The area of empowerment is an area where intractable issues can be embedded and allowed to resolve. It is an area where discernment takes on a hue of depth. An area where being and becoming are one; action and inaction united. We are able to use our total body as a workshop of discovery enlivened with the spirit of being. We become conscious in a different way. Time contracts and expands according to need. Truth gives us a moment to breathe into life and for life to breathe into us and be touched by eternity. This is a limitless dimension that is ordered through the limits of our humanity. It is an invitation to claim what it is to be truly a human being. Human originally came from humane: to be gentle, kindly, feeling and showing of compassion and tenderness. The OED defines being as existence, the fact of belonging to the universe of things material and immaterial.

Understanding the essence of our humanity is understanding the essence of relationship. By fostering a living relationship to ourselves and our environment we establish the ground of our being in a way that allows us to be conscious of the simultaneity inherent in the interrelated nature of our reality. Implicit in this relationship is the spirit that enlivens and gives meaning to this reality, and binds and holds together the integrity of the process. Like love between two people is only revealed indirectly, so too is the inherent spirit of existence. Spirituality is not a thing, it is a relationship. Openness to the unknown in the form of the 'Uninvited Guest' is an unconditional relationship. There is no demand, precondition or value that can be put on the unknown. It is the very acceptance of the unconditionality of the unknown that opens the door to deeper understanding and insight.

Conclusion

The ideas put forward here are not new yet somehow we have forgotten these simple truths. How can we be so divorced from life and expect to thrive? We need to have the courage to invite our life force to the table and offer up an honest meal. Education is as



much about bringing forth that which is innate as it is in imparting what is known. The same sensibility is reflected in the Sanskrit terms 'Śruti', that which is revealed and 'Smriti', that which is remembered. They are both integral to each other and devoid of life when separated.

Technological advances are on the threshold of a quantum leap in development yet our inadequate responses to current challenges show just how unprepared we are as a species for this new world. We lack the outer frameworks and the inner cognizance to act intelligently. The present evolutionary imperative is not merely to be forced to adapt to outer challenges. It is to be intentional in developing inner processes with the perceptive ability that can help broaden and deepen our repertoire of response. This paper begins to articulate the kind of conditions and ground we need to cultivate to gain access to other modes of thinking, feeling and acting.

During the course of the seminar on 'Care' we opened up to the possibility that we are one with all of life and that each of us is not separate from life. With this transcendent realisation comes the constraint of being human with needs and limits and the thought of how can I possibly cope with the awesome responsibility, how can I really care and survive? This is the point of unknowing and with great care and attention, love and affection, the human being can survive.

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Simon W. Davison

Visiting Lecturer, Yale University, December 2007

NB. The cow metaphor is often used in Vedic theology to symbolise the embodiment of matter, spirit and truth; the integrating aspect being the feminine in the form of mother. She is the mother of the Gods and the embodiment of the earth. She is the source of abundance and infinite compassion. It is said when the earth suffers extreme abuse she takes the form of a cow and approaches Lord Vishnu for protection. He incarnates up to ten times. The last and ninth time was as Lord Buddha. The number four is also significant in relation to the cow; four horns, four teats and four legs. Cow embodies 'dharma' to mean that which upholds and supports and the four quarters of 'dharma', referred to as four legs that support: austerity or heat (tapah), purity (shaucham), mercy (dayaa), and truthfulness (satyam).