

THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP: A POETIC PERSPECTIVE**Avraham Cohen****Carl Leggo****Abstract**

A doctoral student and his supervisor describe, conceptualize, and poeticize their mentoring process. Questions related to the distinction between a human being and the role and process of mentoring are explored. The intersubjective and subjective dimensions of experience are explicated for the purposes of providing a living experience for the reader. The reader is invited to participate interactively with the text and with the authors. Various forms of presentation are explored to further the experience and understanding of the reader.

The Mentoring Relationship: A Poetic Perspective

This paradigmatic exegesis is presented as a series of ruminations, epigrams, and poetic expressions, and as a dialogue that is demonstrative of our title with the intention to offer another paradigm and view of the mentoring relationship, one which we feel is radical, creative, and animated. Many might ask if the level of analysis and attention that we give to the mentoring relationship is really necessary. We strongly believe that mentoring of students through the doctoral process is intrinsically an intense experience both academically and psychologically and that the lack of attention to these dimensions will not make them go away, but will ensure that they operate from the shadows to affect the relationship in ways that are far less than optimal. As well, the question might be asked, would “ordinary” professors and students really want to form such intense bonds? Our response is that the not wanting is quite common and it goes along with a lack of awareness as to the implications that already exist, and a lack of awareness of the great opportunities that lie hidden in the shadows. The intensity of the process requires an intense relationship and the failure to have such leads almost invariably to trouble.

Avraham: A mentor doesn’t always dispense wisdom directly, though occasionally he/she does. Sometimes mentorship may show in a way of being and/or with some well articulated insight. The mentoring relationship itself is educative, evocative, and provocative. Before all else, the mentor cultivates and nurtures the relationship and she/he does this by knowing the person and becoming known as a person. This is accomplished by sharing time and space, within which personal stories are told, and private thoughts, feelings, and dreams are shared, mutually, and, perhaps most importantly, in-the-moment responses are expressed in authentic expressions in words and gestures. A personal and scholarly relationship is entered into. It goes almost without saying that no mentorship wisdom will be transmitted unless there is openness and receptivity in the heart and mind of the protégé. In fact, the cultivation of the relationship requires the effort and energy of both the mentor and the protégé.

1mentor A *mentor* is a guide or trusted friend, a wise and faithful counselor. And that is the way Odysseus considered *Mentor*, as revealed in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*.

Carl: Avraham and I enjoy a unique relationship. We are two middle-aged men with diverse backgrounds who serendipitously or fatefully (and we probably don't recognize any significant difference between those two adverbs) found one another while on journeys here and there. Avraham is a psychotherapist and an educator. I am a language educator and a poet. I am also Avraham's doctoral supervisor. In a formal sense, I know little about his professional expertise, and, in turn, he knows little about teaching poetry in secondary classrooms. On the other hand, he and I have also learned together that we share many understandings of lived experience that resonate one with the other. Avraham and I share stories, and a conviction about stories as integral to our growing in humanness. And we share a commitment to language as constitutive of our evolving awareness. Moreover, we both promote the need for holistic approaches to understanding human beings as sentient and sensual, embodied and emotional, logical and biological, intellectual and intuitive, cognitive and creative, idiosyncratic and interdependent. We are also both very busy—Avraham lives a disciplined life by seeking balance amidst a multitude of engagements, and most days I live that way, too. So, he and I are on journeys that often seem distinctly different, heartened by a keen sense of kinship, glad the other is present in the world, grateful for the opportunities to linger together. And in our journeying, we are teaching and challenging one another. As the professor with a contractual, legal, professional, ethical, and moral responsibility for his successful progress through his doctoral program, I sometimes need to insert commas in his applications for ethics review or scholarships. And I need to make sure he meets the stipulations of the Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and the University of British Columbia—that's a lot of stipulations, and happily he attends to the details with a watch-maker's attentiveness to precision. So, mostly I am able to relax and enjoy the journey. Mostly, I am a mentor who journeys with him on what Freire calls "a constitutive path to curiosity" (31). And as Freire suggests, he and I are always "expecting that a new knowledge will arise, transcending another that, in being new, would become old" (32). We are something like ancient shepherds, wandering in meadows and rocky forests, not entirely sure where the sheep are, poking the earth with our staffs shaped like lean, light question marks.

Avraham: I am imagining mentoring as existing in the dream field—the field within which life is lived, either awake or asleep, and that is bracketed by eternity. A perhaps unusual question occurs to me: Is the mentoring relationship itself entered into consciously by each of us? In other words, are they really aware of what they are doing? For the mentoring experience to be vivified I believe that we must agree to a relationship—a relationship that cultivates and nurtures the soul-growth of each—and so, we must be in a process of awakening.

¹ "mentor" *A New Dictionary of Eponyms*. Morton S. Freeman. Oxford University Press, 1997. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of British Columbia. Retrieved on 19 March 2005 from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t31.e243>

Mentoring relationships have the potential to be much more than product or content oriented. Carl, you and I agree and take the radical position that the relationship must address the whole being of mentor and protégé, including the emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and relational dimensions. We see ourselves in a process of learning more about feeling our emotions, thinking, feeling and moving/healing our bodies, being in a state of creative quiet and emptiness, relating to ourselves and to others, and, of course, the subject matter of our studies. Further, we see ourselves in a process of increasing integration through these dimensions that are inextricably connected. A mentor is fluid in her/his movements in and out of these dimensions, never far from any dimension even while a particular one is in the foreground. Similarly, a protégé must have a fluidity with his responsiveness and offerings within the relationship. This is crucial learning and provides the solid ground upon which content learning and product outcomes will optimally occur.

Carl: I am a mentor to many graduate students, but I have had few models of exemplary and effective mentoring. Even though between being a student and a professor I have spent my whole life in school, I regard only two educators as mentors. I have had many good teachers and professors, and I have known many more mediocre teachers and professors, but the only people I count without reservation as mentors are Dr. Ted Aoki and Dr. Rita L. Irwin who have animated my conviction and courage by sustaining sturdy heart connections with me for more than a decade. I know that as a mentor, I am always remembering what I eagerly needed, and continue to need, and how disappointed I was, and continue to be, by the relationships I have had with so many teachers and professors who were not mentors. In particular, too many professors I have known have been so caught up in professing their own pain and ambition and self-absorbed preoccupations, that they had little energy, spirit, time, or imagination to offer others. There are mentors who are not effective, wearing the name, bearing the name *mentor*, but lacking the gifts and skills, including patience, heart, and courage, to create and nurture relationships of mentorship.

Before examining some central qualities of mentorship, I will present a poem I wrote for Ted Aoki:

VOWELS

(for Ted Aoki)

*with Ted I walk in the moment,
a tangled line of metonymic moments,
making the momentous story
where moments are still and eternal*

always in motion, he lingers long
in locations where he stands steady,
sturdy, in the dizzy, always
shape-shifting landscape of holes
like a floating archipelago, best
navigated by memory, and faith

in the mysteries of the alphabet

in his words I am rendered
pneumatic, with feet dangling
in both the earth and the heart's
imagining of poetic possibilities,
still waiting for names

he holds the vowels that breathe
life in our consonants, constantly
ready to know the *I* in our writing,
the metonymic wildness of *I*

he knows the messy texture
of lived experiences, and follows
the line of discipline to know
the oblique, porous, capacious
line that is no line

Ted lives in language, and
language lives in Ted,
drawing us to see what we
overlook, focuses attention
on tension, both tending
and attending, throwing out
lines, here and there, enamoured
with the fecundity of conjunctions

reminds us that grammar, the letter,
the law are chimerical, even comical,
like an alchemist of gramarye,
transforms stone and water
into pigments for re-presenting
the world in words, always
both familiar and unfamiliar,
a seer who teaches us to see

*with Ted I walk in the moment,
a tangled line of metonymic moments,
making the momentous story
where moments are still and eternal
—C. Leggo*

Avraham: Along the lines of Dr. Aoki as described above, Alfried Langle (2005), one of the pre-eminent existential analysts in the world and who worked with Viktor Frankl for ten years,

states that all problems can be seen as issues of dialogue—dialogue with the self and dialogue with the world and, in particular, dialogue with another human being. Dialogue means more than just an exchange of words. It refers to all the dimensions of personal exchange between people. Included are words, tone, pace, body position, body movement, dress, facial expression, congruence or lack of congruence between dimensions of expression, indicators of listening, indicators of being affected, and more. All of these are components of dialogue. A mentor needs to have facility with such dialogue processes and move fluidly between them. As well, it is crucial that the protégé have a facility and an interest in developing such dialogue processes. A mentoring relationship is a multi-dimensional, inclusive, relational, and mutually engaging connection between all participants who are within the “proximal zone of development” (Vygotsky, 1978).

Carl: In the six ruminations on mentorship that I share here, Ted Aoki and Rita Irwin are the mentors who inspire me.

Rumination 1: Mentorship is living, and a way of being and becoming in the world.

Mentorship thrives in relationship. Mentorship should not suggest a sense of hierarchy, an understanding that the mentor is the wise, omniscient, omnipotent meteoric authority who dispenses knowledge and wisdom to the mentored in measured and metered increments. Mentorship is a process, a relationship, a journey. In ancient times, a family slave called a pedagogue led the child (Gr. *paidagogos*, *paidos*=child+*agein*=to lead) to the teacher. The pedagogue was not the teacher; the pedagogue was the one who led the student to the place of teaching and learning. The pedagogue walked with the student, the two engaged in a journey, and in the journey, the real pedagogic relationship was exemplified. And lately, I have been ruminating on another lovely Greek word, *paraclete*, which means the one who walks alongside of you, interceding, advocating, calling, comforting. This is the model of the mentor that I seek. In a similar way, Vanier (1991) explains that “an accompanier is someone who can stand beside us on the road to freedom, someone who loves us and understands our life” (p. 128). Moreover, “the word ‘accompaniment,’ like the word ‘companion,’ comes from the Latin words *cum pane*, which mean ‘with bread.’ It implies sharing together, eating together, nourishing each other, walking together” (p. 129). In a meaningful relationship of mentorship, then, people are journeying together, being and becoming in the world, responding to one another, responsible both for their own living experiences on the earth, as well as the living experiences of others. The effective mentor fires the hearts and the imaginations of others, not with platitudes and shopworn homilies that nobody believes, but with the model of a life committed to learning and teaching, to risk-taking and experimentation, to journeying and growing. Being a mentor is a way of life, the living out of a vocation or calling, a way of dwelling in the world. The mentor is a visionary whose feet are firm and steady in the soil (even mud) of real lived experience with all the constraints imposed by time and money and differences of opinion, while at the same time dreaming new possibilities.

Avraham: Mentor is a role that is assumed by a person and often takes over the person without any awareness on their part. The person is the pilot, awake or not. Mentoring takes place within a certain time and place. The protégé’s experience is similar in the process. The combination of mentor and protégé as roles within a time-place context is an example of a timespirit. Army Mindell (1995) describes timespirits:

A cultural rank, position, or viewpoint that depends on time and place. Roles and timespirits change rapidly because they are a function of the moment and locality. Roles in groups are not fixed, but fluid. They are filled by different individuals and parties over time, keeping the roles in a constant state of flux. (p. 42)

So, in this sense we are two beings who are open to being infused with the timespirits of mentor and protégé, including the possibility that either timespirit may at a given moment infuse either of us even though there may be a dominant tendency that we both ‘agree’ to.

Carl: *Rumination 2: Mentorship is an active process of composing in language and discourse.* Language is no simple tool for the clear expression of understanding. Instead, language is the creative medium by which we construct meaning collaboratively. Mentors need to acknowledge that in their teaching, in their interactions with students, they are not dispensing knowledge and facts and skills like a server at a fast food outlet. Instead, they are engaging learners in an endlessly complex process of language use, including conjecturing, questioning, reading, writing, talking, listening, viewing, and representing.

As Sara Mills (1997) proposes, “discourses do not exist in isolation, but are the object and site of struggle. Discourses are thus not fixed but are the site of constant contestation of meaning” (p. 16). Because discourses are not fixed, then truth and knowledge are produced or created in the interactions of people. Mills explains: “Truth ... is something which societies have to work to produce, rather than something which appears in a transcendental way” (p. 18). From a postmodern perspective, the subject is a construct that is always in process, and therefore identity is always changing and flexible. In my writing and researching and living I am always composing, interrogating, revising, and challenging my understanding of identities—my own as well as others. I am caught up in what Eagleton (1996) calls the “social dimension of subjectivity” (p. 91). I am always writing myself and rewriting myself, even as I write and rewrite an understanding of the identities of people I meet and know and collaborate with, even as they, in turn, are writing themselves and one another and me. As Mills explains:

the process of finding a position for oneself within discourse is never fully achieved, but is rather one of constantly evaluating and considering one’s position and, inevitably, constantly shifting one’s perception of one’s position and the wider discourse as a whole. (p. 97)

Mentors emphasize the performative and creative activity of language. Human beings are really human be(com)ings constituted in the play of language. Too often we use language to declare, assert, prove, argue, convince, and proclaim notions of “truth.” But what happens when we emphasize the use of language to question and play with and savour and ruminate on notions of “truth”? Language as performance invites collaboration and conversation, and a keen sense of confidence that we are engaging together in creating intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic possibilities. We all need to be committed to writing and re-writing our stories together, and we need to be committed to hearing one another’s stories, too. By understanding language as

performance, I am reminded that language does not empower me to nail down truth or truths. Instead, language is dynamic and energetic, and opens up possibilities for understanding our lives and experiences and relations. As Ursula A. Kelly (1997) writes, "Seizing the importance of re-presenting and re-writing our selves as we reconstruct our visions of world communities entails deconstructing the stories we tell (of) ourselves and the desires that inform them" (p. 49). **Avraham:** Here are some ideas taken from a manual on intimacy that I (2001) wrote in a section titled "Relationship and Crucifixion":

Jesus talked about having loving and meaningful relationships, and also demonstrated an apparently intimate relationship with a higher power, G_D. For this, he was killed. In some sense this is still happening on a daily basis to anyone who would have an intimate experience.

Intimate relationships are not separate from the entire context within which we live. A relationship which is struggling for intimacy and consciousness can be viewed as confronting the fabric of mainstream society. This can draw a counter-force that attempts to obliterate and deny the existence of this generative energy. The Crucifixion Metaphor represents a potential for anyone struggling in relationship. The attack comes from the shadow of the culture either from external forces or from the part of us that carries this shadow. The crucifying experience can come in forms such as the inner voice of criticism, outer voices saying things like, "why do you have to be so intense?," "lighten up," and "why are you two always talking to each other in *that way*?" All these examples and more are attacks on feeling, relationship, and intimacy with yourself and with others.

.... Any relationship which seems out of the mainstream may be looked at strangely. A relationship which is in a process of growth and change can represent a threat. Relationships which are working on becoming more intimate can elicit strange reactions. This seems to be at odds with the idea that intimacy is what we strive for in our relationships. Relationships which are perceived as outside the mainstream either by being more intimate, less intimate, or just different than the cultural norms are reflections of the shadow of the culture and can attract a lot of uncomfortable attention. The collective culture supports status quo or breakdown in relationship more easily than it does a relationship which is outside the norms and demonstrates high levels of intimacy.

The collective consciousness is involved in a paradox. It seeks intimacy and simultaneously attempts to destroy it. All of us struggle in our own way to make our relationships work. This is done mostly in secret and alone. With a few exceptions community relationships exist only on ceremonial occasions. Relationship issues are not cause

for the community to gather together to lend support and to become involved. For the most part our sense of community has been lost.... Collectively we still carry the archetypal image of meaningful community, but we are too busy and lack the relational abilities for the most part to make this real for ourselves.

Relationship is a way for raising personal and collective consciousness. Through such a process it is possible to create 'bonded multiple consciousnesses'. This type of relationship would be amongst two or more individuals who are committed to ongoing work on the process and content of their relationships. This type of consciousness has the possibility of surpassing the levels of individual consciousness of even some of the great spiritual leaders of the past and present. This is what is required in these increasingly complex times. Creating this level of consciousness produces a heat which alters that by which it is surrounded. That which is surrounding simultaneously organizes its resources to resist the transformation. In situations of optimal intensity, the catalytic process which these relationships manifest may be named as cancerous and forces brought to bear to eradicate the relationship or conversely a conscious relationship can serve as a beacon to which others can relate. Often both are happening. (pp. 31-32)

I have included this lengthy quote as I feel it captures a unique and significant possibility, namely that the mentoring relationship itself, along with some other types of relationships, has the potential to be a mentoring agent for the larger community that is within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). I also believe that it captures some of the range of response that this article will engender. The possibility and importance of mentoring relationships that go beyond the context of the two or three involved members is crucial and significant. One person is no longer enough. The process of relationship development that involves inner work, relationship work, human becomingness, and community development is critical to the future of education, and more importantly, to the human beings who are involved in the learning processes of both curriculum content and what it is to be human and in dialogical relationship.

Carl: *Rumination 3: Mentorship is loving.*

As an educator I choose to love, I choose to believe in love, I choose to teach in love. To accept the vocation of teacher/teaching is to enter into relationships of love where I will seek the value, the merit, the significance in my students, filled with hope (even in the face of hopelessness) that they, too, will seek the value, the merit, the significance in themselves, and one another, and me. In *Images of Love, Words of Hope*, Jean Vanier (1991) writes that "a person knows when he or she is valued and loved. We give value to people by the way we look at them, by the way we listen to them, and by the way we touch them, and care for them. We give value to them by the way we are present to them" (p. 12).

Mentors need to love the people they aspire to teach and inspire with wisdom, and this requires that they enter imaginatively into the lived experiences of others. They need to listen to others. They need to learn from others. They need to listen to the stories of others. It is not enough to know how to manage the dynamics of a classroom or conduct a supervisory committee meeting or organize a busy timetable. Mentors need to hear the stories of others so that they know the others they are serving. They need to be gentle and hopeful and tender and intimate. The mentor fills people with courage and hope and resolve to live in the now, to live each day with purpose. I am not claiming that all mentors will, or even can, love others in the same ways. And I am certainly not proposing a single notion of love, but informed by long spiritual traditions, including Judeo, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic traditions, that promote love as essential to human well-being, I support the optimistic notion that teachers need to practice love in all the delightful manifestations of respect, honour, care, and attentiveness.

Avraham: The timespirit of mentor has appeared in many forms and times in my life, some with an accompanying official dimension, like Carl, others more transient, and some strongly ensconced in my more private life. Here is a paean to the idea of the beloved, which I will leave to the reader to interpret in terms of what wisps may apply to our subject matter here:

When I awaken possessed by vulnerability
my lover walks me back to the waking world.

I notice another thought in-between-worlds.

I can't remember.

It scuttled back to the darkness as I went along in the other direction.

My lover is my spirit mentor when I am in a state of not-knowing,

Unless she is also in another other world,

In which case she could be my Companion...

—A.Cohen

Mentors show up when needed, and sometimes are very hard to discern. Other times they are plain. Sometimes they seem to be on vacation.

I wonder if conceptualizing another as evil is not the greatest evil. The act of conceptualizing turns the other into an object, a thing. A mentoring relationship struggles to see the person and their gifts through the fog of character and the urges to judge and label.

Carl: *Rumination 4: Mentorship is communicating and communing.*

Like Romand Coles (1992) I promote "a belonging in difference" (p. ix). The word *community* is derived from the Latin *communis* which means *common*, as are the words *communicate*, *commune*, and *communion*. Community is about communicating, about revealing and imparting and sharing gifts of language, about participating in the formation of identity in our story-making. We tell one another our stories; we listen to one another's stories.

I have been profoundly influenced by Ted Aoki (1997) who understands that "living in the spaces is what teaching is (p.10)." For Aoki, "the important thing is to understand that if in my class I have 20 students, then there are 21 interspaces between me and students. These interspaces are spaces of possibilities. So what we allow to happen, what can be constituted and reconstituted in those interspaces is what we mean by life in the classroom" (p. 10).

Of course there are also interspaces between each student and all the others, contributing to an intricate rhizomatic network of lines and spaces of connection and communication, perhaps without end.

Postmodernism promotes the concept of community based on diversity. The notion of unity in community has an enduring appeal, but out of my lifetime of active participation in many communities (scholastic, academic, rural, urban, spiritual, athletic, industrial, familial), I now interrogate conceptions of unity in community. William Corlett (1989) "attempts to celebrate both community and difference" (p. 6). Corlett observes that "bringing unity seems always to require silencing the so-called parts that do not fit the holistic vision, and I want no part of that" (p. 6). Instead Corlett celebrates "the infinite difference of fellow beings" in community without unity (p. 22). For Corlett, "to live extravagantly is to give gifts freely, to cultivate one's gifts in all directions" (p. 211). Teachers and students need to embrace Corlett's vision as they revel together in story-making that celebrates both community and difference, as they revel in the explosion of stories, common and unique, that frame and structure our lived experiences. Therefore, I promote a conception of community that is not based on a counterproductive emphasis on unity. As Suzanne de Castell (1994) observes, "morals, values, beliefs, language and ... literacy are ... created and sustained in communities. They are not otherwise either possible or meaningful" (p. 62). De Castell adds:

we are not, except in the most abstract and artificial of senses, ever simply individuals. We are concretely, always, embedded in differentially constraining and enabling social relations; what happens to us, what we are allowed to or allow ourselves to learn, and most important of all, what that learning is good for, is not a function of who we are as individuals, but of who we are in social relations of membership in particular communities. (p. 63)

As Haase and Large (2001) note, "the human community rests on communication by way of language" (p. 98) and "we become individuals by being inserted into this community of language. Consequently, such linguistic communication makes up the very nature of our existence" (p. 98).

Avraham: The story goes that a good mentor will bring a protégé to the point beyond which he or she must go on their own, and a good mentor will facilitate the going. I wonder about the

inability of mentors to grow past their own limitations. After all, they usually have a great head start on their protégés. Mentors can model all kinds of things. Why not model going over the edge of their current and limiting pattern of identity? Why not work on the development of communities that will support such development?

Carl: *Rumination 5: Mentorship is holistic.*

In *Pedagogy of the Heart* (1997), published posthumously, Paulo Freire presents a cogent explanation for his writing: “I refuse to accept a certain type of scientific criticism that insinuates that I lack rigor in the way I deal with these issues or the overaffective language I use in this process” (p. 30). He adds:

I am a totality and not a dichotomy. I do not have a side of me that is schematic, meticulous, nationalist, and another side that is disarticulated or imprecise, which simply likes the world. I know with my entire body, with feelings, with passion, and also with reason. (p. 30)

Mentorship is holistic

I locate my research and writing and teaching in experiences of the body because my sense of knowledge and identity, my interrelationships with others, my understanding of subjectivity are all caught up in language and living in the corporeality of the body. I am a living body, a writing body, a teaching body, a knowing and being and becoming body.

And mentorship is also spiritual and emotional. In *A Little Compendium on That Which Matters* (1993), Frederick Franck writes about “The New Order” which he describes as:

a network of loners, encompassing those who reflect on the meaning of being Human in our technotronic rat trap, who dare to fathom the depths of life, of death, in order to attain a life-praxis, an ethos suitable for this end-time: a religious orientation to existence. Without badge, without watchword, they recognize, hearten one another. (pp. 23-24)

I know myself to be part of this “network of loners,” calling out to others, seeking to connect heartfully with others.

Avraham: Mentors have a wide range of metaskills (Cohen, 2002; Mindell, 1994/2001).

Metaskills are the feelings and attitudes that a mentor exhibits in-the-moment that are reflective of his/her most deeply held beliefs and values and that accompany what might more rightly be called skills. They are the feeling-attitudes that accompany skills such as giving feedback on the protégé’s work, and which will dictate how well or badly the feedback will be taken. The demonstration and conscious use of metaskills imparts a sense of aliveness and immediacy that fires and inspires the relationship. Metaskills are a representation of the spiritual dimension of the relationship. They are the intangibles that create and fuel the tangible.

Mentoring is a process. It is a moment-by-moment unfolding of experience. A mentor will recognize that whatever is happening is a point, a moment in time, and that the process will move and the time will change. Nothing stands still. The river cannot be walked in twice.

Carl: *Rumination 6: Mentorship is a gift, freely offered.*

In recent months I've received some rejections from editors and publishers. A part of me always responds with a sense of indignation. What's wrong with these editors? Don't they understand the energetic efforts I've invested in the writing? Can't they appreciate the significance of my writing? I am always surprised, offended, upset when editors and publishers respond that they don't want my writing. They often include in their form rejection slip a note about how they receive far more manuscripts than they can publish. Indeed, they often note that they publish only about ten per cent of the submissions they receive. I am seldom satisfied with this explanation, especially since I always seem convinced that I ought to be part of the worthy ten per cent who are accepted. But I really need to consider carefully why I write. Am I writing because I want to publish a lot; am I writing because I want to be famous; am I writing because I want to make lots of money? Truthfully, I must confess that I write because I am called, even compelled, to write. Writing is not so much a choice, but a calling that I simply must respond to. Therefore, when I offer my writing to others, I am offering the writing that has emerged from an intense, personal, significant commitment to living in the world as a writer. What I need to be careful about is assuming that others will necessarily share in that personal commitment. In other words, I am writing, first, for myself. I am writing because I cannot imagine living without writing, including the challenges, joys, and frustrations. So, when I submit my writing to editors and publishers, or to family and friends, I am offering gifts. The problem is that in my imagination I have bought into the concept of gifts as requiring reciprocity. In other words, I am caught up in the common experience that if I offer you a gift, you will likely reciprocate with a gift in exchange. For example, I might offer you a necktie and you might give me a pair of socks. There are few experiences in contemporary North American culture where reciprocity is not expected. If I offered you a gift on your birthday, I would expect you to offer me a gift on my birthday, and if you failed to offer me a gift on my birthday, I would almost certainly delete your name from my birthday gift list for the next year.

But this is not the way writing works, and it is not the way that mentorship works. When I offer my writing to others, I must offer it as a gift without an expectation of an exchange. I pursue my writing because it calls, even compels, me, and how the writing is received or not received is not any part of my process of writing and offering. I can't offer my writing to others, and then be offended that they don't want it. Why should my writing have to appeal to everybody? All the time? Of course, it won't. So, I offer my writing like I am casting it into the wind. If one day, a sparrow or gull or swallow or crow returns with a scrap in its beak and sings out a familiar phrase or rhythm, then I can dance a joyful jig, but I will not wallow in despair when there is no return.

And so it is with mentoring, too. I recently stumbled on the website *Rate Your Professor* where I read one former student's comment: *Overrated. His star is no longer ascending.* At least one former student is not happy with me. I wonder how many more unhappy students remember me with disappointment, hurt, and frustration. I will never know. All I know is that I am devoted to being the best mentor I can be. But I also know that I offer my mentorship as a gift. I don't know who can receive my mentoring. I don't know who will receive it now and learn later that it

was not as useful as they initially thought. I don't know who will reject my gifts of mentoring now and learn later that what I offered was in fact valuable. So, I don't mentor in order to receive accolades from students. I don't mentor because I want students to like me. I don't mentor because I am motivated by hopes that my students will imitate me or propagate my views and practices. I mentor because I am called, compelled even, to mentor. To offer gifts. I live as a mentor. I live my mentoring. In the enthusiastic act of mentoring I can't tell the mentor from the mentoring, the dancer from the dance. I am. I offer what I am. Some receive the gifts with joy. Others do not. My calling is to offer the gifts, and to offer them without expecting anything in return.

Avraham: The relationship between mentor and protégé can serve as a model of what is possible between human beings. The mentoring relationship itself can mentor others who come in contact with the mentoring relationship. The relationship itself is a teacher both to the participants and to witnesses.

Blink

Blink once

It's gone.

Blink twice

It's back.

Don't blink

Get stuck.

Blink continuously

Life throbs.

—a. cohen

•

Do you remember who influenced you?

Do you remember who protected you?

Do you remember who spoke up for you?

Do you remember who mattered to you so much that the thought of them
excited you?

Do you remember whose passion inspired you?

Do you? Do you? Do you?

—A. Cohen

History

(Avraham's version)

When I first met you in the beginning of 2002, I had no idea who you were or what would develop out of our relationship. I had one five-minute phone call with you prior to being accepted into the doctoral program in the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction. You had left me a message saying that you were the graduate advisor, that you had my application, that there was a meeting to decide about applicants next week, and that you wanted to talk to me. I called. We spoke and I knew that I was excited about what you said about the program.

My first face to face contact with you was greatly surprising to me. You supported me in every idea and possibility that I mentioned even while adding to the possibilities and carefully speaking about conditions and factors to consider. I have spent my whole life becoming increasingly aware of being different from most people in both my way of being and in my ways of thinking, and at times paying a high price for this. You made it more than okay for me to be the different person that I am and to pursue the work that mattered to me. How did you do this? What was the alchemy? I wondered who you were and how it was that I was embarking on this incredible adventure and my biggest fear was not whether I would be allowed to do what I felt was important and about which I was passionate. Your unconditional acceptance and support meant that I was face to face with an even bigger dilemma, namely, doing what I really wanted to do without engaging a major part of my resources to hold off opposition.

As I found out, having now known you for almost three years, my initial experience was an initiatory signal. I found you to be incredibly encouraging and accepting. I discovered along the way that your acceptance was consistent, real, and based in an ever more complex knowing of me and my work. You demonstrated a unique ability to know and recall details and to extrapolate from small bits of information and patterns. All this led to an incredible challenge for me that was reminiscent of my original mentor, Dr. Peter Lavelle, a kind, yet tough Irish man, who happened to be a psychiatrist and the director of a residential treatment center for severely emotionally disturbed adolescents, and who had hired me as a child care counsellor. In that job very early I was up against my own limits and face to face with very deeply-seeded personal fears. I quickly found myself in a position where in most jobs I would have been let go. He saw something in me and went well beyond the proverbial extra mile to create an opportunity for me to deal with my issues and access my potential. He told me, “you’re sitting on your own power,” and he challenged and encouraged me to deal with what was in me and in my way. At that time his willingness to supply me with a unique form of tough-love meant survival for me. I was able to take advantage of what was offered and eventually thrive in that environment where many of my current ideas were germinated and cultivated. He saw something in me as do you. He worked

with many people in this way as do you. Both of you have an enduring and uncanny ability to educate, evoke, and provoke what is best in me. In my view, that is the essence of a mentoring relationship.

I am fortunate at this point in my life that emotional survival is no longer the issue it once was. You and I have come together at a time when optimal expression of my creative talents, academically, professionally, and personally, is my ground of experience. You and I have co-created an environment where it was clear if there was a limitation on what I did, it lay within me and was not part of the external environment and where I had to deal with my own habit of thought that the world and its constituent characters would always be putting obstacles in my way.

I have learned that I can publish, get awards, and most importantly produce work that is representative of what matters to me, and as I have found out, to many others. If I choose one key idea over all others that I have had confirmed by you, that idea is that human beings do respond to encouragement extremely well. I would add one other point in relation to this encouragement that you give just to clear away any possible question that could arise in a reader. Your skills include the capacity for giving guidance and feedback when I was headed off down a path that was not likely to have a good payoff and you always did this in the service of me and my work and never to further your own ideas or enhance your own profile.

Of course, in order for you to be a great mentor, we had to have the capacity to have great dialogue and I had to meet certain criteria as and be a great protégé, and I think that I am. I am at a time in my life where many things are in place. I have a great deal of stability in terms of the material world, a meaningful and creative relationship with my most intimate friend, and my health, which has been problematic at times in my life, is quite stable, as is my spiritual development and associated practices. I am able to attend to the details. You do not have to hand-hold me. I come with great energy and resources to pursue my work and research interests. I am attentive to the details in a way that ensures you do not have to watch them for me. I get things to you on time and very often in a good form. I am sensitive to your limits, work load, and physical state. There are intangibles that can't be stated in a concrete way, such as my liking and respect for you. Perhaps, most importantly, I feel that as a protégé it is crucial that I allow myself to be open and receptive while still maintaining my sense of myself and my ability to think critically.

The term I-thou emanates from the Jewish Philosopher Martin Buber (1970). He says, "The basic word I-You establishes the world of relations" (p. 56). What Buber strongly suggests is that I exist and that the statement of 'I' immediately constellates 'You.' He goes on to say, "I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter... Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur" (pp. 62-63).

Buber is saying that we exist as an integrated whole when the encounter occurs. Of course, we have to have the encounter. If we pass by each other, then there is no encounter and there is no I-You. At moments in our relationship we know that there is only the singularity of I-You. In truth, I-You always existed and our possibility is to stop and look for the already existing meeting/encounter.

Another perspective is provided in George Leonard's book *The Way of Aikido* (2000) in reference to connecting with another:

Mitsugi Saotome quotes aikido's founder, Morehei Ueshiba, as saying, "True victory is not defeating an enemy. True victory gives love and changes the enemy's heart." (p. 150)

This unique view of combat is part of the Ki philosophy of Morehei Ueshiba (Ueshiba, K, 1984/1987). Ueshiba is talking about transforming the heart of an enemy. Surely, we can hope to find a better reception with a friend, an intimate, and a mentor or protégé, who may be predisposed to love already. You and I have somehow agreed on the mutual heart transformation project as an intrinsic part of my doctoral work. I suspect that this is not a new experience for you.

Stephen Gilligan (1997) in *The Courage to Love* asserts that love plays a prominent role in psychotherapy. I would suggest that the same is true in a mentoring relationship. Gilligan's notions of *sponsorship* are consistent with the ideas about mentorship that we are proposing:

In examining love as a courage and a skill, self-relations emphasizes the principle and practices of sponsorship, whereby the agency of mindfulness may touch and "be with" something as a means to bring human value and transformation to it. The corollary of this is that whatever is unchanging in human experience is not being sponsored. Thus, the skills of sponsorship allow the natural process of change to occur. Sponsorship occurs in many different contexts: a parent with a child, a person with her own a experiences, a therapist with a client, an artist with archetypal or artistic processes, a friend with a person in need, a person in nature. In each situation, the fressen² energies of life are flowing, and sponsorship is the skill by which such energies of life are flowing, and sponsorship is the skill by which such energies are cultivated into the vital essen forms of human being.... Sponsorship skills include deep listening, proper naming, providing a place, expressing, blessing, connecting, disciplining, protecting, encouraging, and challenging. (pp. 96-97)

Now you may ask what do I mean by love in this context and how does it emerge in mentoring. First, allow me to digress to Herrigel's (1989) *Zen in the Art of Archery*:

The instructor's business is not to show the way itself, but to enable the pupil to get the feel of the way to the goal by adapting it to his individual peculiarities. He will therefore begin by training him to

avoid thrusts instinctively, even when they take him completely by surprise. (p. 100)

I wonder how many have learned to avoid any expressions of love, viewing it, at the least, as a mistake or embarrassment and, at worst, an attack. Even if you do not respond so extremely, if you have had the experience of receiving love and are eager to be the recipient, you may still be awkward as you may not have had a good model of either how to receive or give love. Surely, a mentor must be in a process of learning love as a method. In this way of using the word 'method,' I am talking about a metaskill. In the mentoring dialogue we are talking about the moment-to-moment feeling of love that the mentor and the mentee may embody even as they are talking about subject matter. Eventually, the mentoring process and love are intertwined. This is love as state of being, an atmosphere, and ought not to be confused with romantic or sexual love. It is not love for; rather it is being within an atmosphere of love. This nurturance of an atmosphere of love is as much my responsibility as it yours, and really it is the outcome of our creation of I-thou encounter.

Finally

So, Carl, what does all this say about our dialogic mentoring relationship and how we relate within and between ourselves? I will answer this in my way and I invite you to answer in your way.

Though our mentoring relationship has worked extremely well, I would say that we have really just scratched the surface of what is possible. There are many ways that we barely know each other and I feel that this is untapped ground for other possibilities. In particular, while we have shared openly many personal stories, I feel that there are still many gaps. There is also a component of relationship that can only come with time. So, while I am very happy with our relationship, I am curious about what else is possible and what the future may hold.

What does it All Mean?

Carl, can you please tell me

What does it all mean?

I'd really like to know.

Can I tell you something strange and wondrous?

Would you like to know?

Really, would you?

I dream of following the process

Ever deeper into the question

Following Simone's words.

Intimately knowing another

In the moment

Each moment.

Being known by another

In the moment

Each moment.

Becoming an I-Thou

That mentors by its very way of being

In, to, and for the world.

—A. Cohen

Carl: *A few more words, the final words, at least for now*

Thank you, Avraham, for the blessings that inspire our mentoring relationship. This essay represents part of our ongoing and dialogic process to understand the experience and practice of mentorship. We acknowledge and compose connections amidst an extensive range of ruminations, narratives, poetry, and citations, steeped in a commitment to interdisciplinary and creative scholarship and living. Our research is connected to explorations and explanations of what Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) calls *transformative learning*. As Morrell and O'Connor (2002) explain in the introduction to *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis* (edited with O'Sullivan):

We are most interested in the generation of energy for radical vision, action, and new ways of being. If humans are going to survive on this planet, we need new connections to each other and to the natural world. Changing political and economic relationships is part of the larger project of reconstituting and revitalizing all of our relationships.
(p. xvii)

We claim simply that transformative learning can be effectively promoted by giving attention to the dynamic possibilities of re-imagining mentorship. Like Ron Pelias (2004), our research and

writing begin “in the desire to write from the heart” and to practice research that does not hide “behind the illusion of objectivity,” but instead seeks to create “an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice” (p. 1). And like Pelias, we “want a scholarship that fosters connections, opens spaces for dialogue, heals” (2). Therefore, much like David Whyte (1994) who in *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America* seeks “to bring the insights of the poetic imagination out of the garret and into the boardrooms and factory floors of America” (p. 10), we are a part of a network of poets and researchers who are working to bring the wisdom of poetic knowing and poetic living into human science research. Ours is a journey of tenderness and courage, love and light, admiration and astonishment, hearing with the eyes and ears of the heart, attending to the places and people that nurture us. So, as I began my ruminations with a poem for one mentor, Ted Aoki, I close with another poem dedicated to my other mentor, Rita L. Irwin. These are the people who have guided me most graciously, and, Author One, as our mentoring relationship continues to emerge like a long poem, we can continue to be inspirited by them, as we, in turn, continue to inspirit one another, and others, in all the possibilities of relationship.

Light Lines
(for Rita Irwin)

with winter’s end, silver birches stand
along the parallel borders of the highway,
bare, lean, awash in late afternoon light,
like a topsy-turvy sea of vertical waves,
iterable far beyond even keen eyesight

like Charlton Heston in Cecil B. DeMille’s
dazzling miracle commanded the parting
of the Red Sea, the highway is a charcoal line
that divides and defines the tangled wilderness
in a text that invites and defies perspective

the birches hold light like Chinese lanterns,
and I want to learn how to breathe light,
and hold its scent long in memory, to hear
light seep into stone, to taste savoury light
on the skin, to know the language of light

like I once stood in a Richmond gallery
surrounded by Rita’s art, her imagined trees
and light rendered with heart and hand,
till now I linger, once again, face to face
with the limits of language, and wonder

how Rita would evoke the silver birches
full of spring light, and I wish for the artist’s

ways of knowing, want only to write the lines
of light I have witnessed so you can know
how light dances up a storm beyond words
—C. Leggo

There are many more ruminations, more than we can ever compose or share. For now, these six ruminations hint at some of the dynamics that Avraham and I are living in our mentoring, our meandering, and our meaning-making. We are two human beings, two human becomings, leaning on one another and learning from one another. We know our subject positions as mentors/learners/teachers/writers/researchers/sojourners—a dizzying list of signifiers signifying much ado without end. We know a lot about what mentoring is not. We know the graduate scholar is no indentured servant, lackey, or gopher. And we know the mentor is no guru, no enlightened master. And we know a lot about what mentoring is, too, and we have shared a little of that wisdom here. But mostly what we are learning is that when curious, enthusiastic, heartfelt people acknowledge one another, they engage in a creative experience of awakening, and the whole world grows brighter with wakefulness.

Avraham: Yes!

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