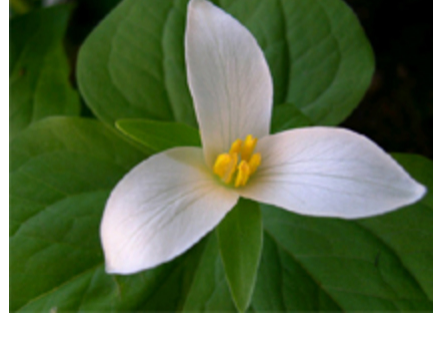




Presencing Issue 51

Musing on Muse



Mu Preview, Cocoon of Silence: Many years ago, before I had my first experience of presencing. I became aware that when I was having a conversation with certain persons, or a small group, something unusual would start to happen. As we were speaking and listening back-and-forth to one another, we seemed to be surrounded by a soft cushion of silence; the words and the responses also became timeless, as if suspended in an empty spaciousness. Each of us would be aware of this quality of suspension. Another aspect of these conversations; they would continue from where they left off, no matter how long the hiatus. What I now realize is that in these conversations, we were sharing presence together.

Now I am much more familiar with these kinds of mutual sharings, and recognize that timelessness, silence, and emptiness are recurrent factors underlying these encounters. Three months ago I was in a meeting with a group of about 24 men. Before any words were shared there was a long period of candlelight and silence. What was remarkable to me was how long the silence was lasting as I started experiencing another aspect of presencing; *mu* or emptiness. It seemed that there was a collective comfort with the silence and emptiness in the room. I realized something inside; an opening to what in Buddhism is called the gateless gate. It is an ineffable, indescribable shared sense of Being and non being.

Mu Means: Mu was introduced in Chinese Chan Buddhism sometime around the ninth century, by the question: "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" The answer given was "Mu" or "Wu" in Chinese. Since then this question-answer encounter has been used for koan (puzzle) exercises between teacher and students in Zen Buddhism, in order to test the student's level of awareness. Koans do not have specific answers, so they are used also to put the student into a state of conundrum in which he/she cannot rely on intellect to answer the question. The answer "mu" has been interpreted in various ways which cause Zen practitioners to continually ponder the meaning of the answer. Mu has been interpreted to mean: no, zero, nothingness, *sunyata* ~ emptiness or void.

Mu 1, Entering Emptiness: My first experience of mu occurred on Orcas Island many years ago when I was volunteering as an emergency medical technician. I received a call from the doctor on the island that a patient whom I had been checking on regularly, was reportedly laying on the bathroom floor (his wife had called in). When I arrived, Harold was on the floor, not breathing, eyes open, body stiff, and cold. I wondered how long it had been before his wife discovered his body. I made a code-yellow call for the ambulance, and proceeded to talk with his wife. She was quite flustered and upset. I did my best to comfort her before the ambulance came, and after they left with Harold's body. I stayed there listening to her until I could feel that she had settled down and was much less fearful. Finally, when I went outside to my car, I realized that it had been snowing heavily; the car buried in snow. My attempts to extricate the car were in vain. So I decided to walk home about a mile in the snow. Though the hour was late, and there were no street lights the whiteness of the snow gave ample light. I was thinking about Harold and his wife and replaying the experience as I was walking. About 2/3s of the way I suddenly saw a skull in my mind's eye, and heard Shakespeare's famous line: "Death where is thy sting." The skull and the message were very comforting.



When I got to my home and went inside, I realized that I did not want to wake my family. I decided that I would quietly meditate, sitting on the living room floor. My mind was surprisingly quiet in spite of the previous experience. What happened next I cannot describe, except to say, that I entered a state of no-self, non-being. When I emerged from this cocoon of emptiness my whole body was glowing with the most pleasant feelings I have ever experienced, and I immediately realized that I had experienced non-being or mu. The ramifications of that experience has intrigued me to this day.



Mu 2, Non-Being: Two years after I finished graduate school I was sitting in my writing coach Priscilla's living room, writing about the things I was observing outside of her window. It was an exercise I would later call "searching for meaning." I was looking for ways to describe the deeper essence of things using words. All of a sudden I realized that every object I was entreating with words: leaves, trees, birds, clouds, bridge, persons, boats, water, my body; was suffused with emptiness. With that awareness my writing changed because the essence of existence contained spaciousness that

invited my consciousness IN; a kind of sharing of essence rather than just observation.

Later that day I was working on my friend Jack's body. I told him about my writing experience at the beginning of the session. We had shared many situations of "searching for meaning" together. Jack was a retired business executive, and quite a large man, having been a shot-putter in college. I was working on Jack's right shoulder, when all of a sudden, Jack disappeared! With my hands I could feel his body, with my ears I could hear his words, and I could still see my own hands and arms, but with my eyes I was seeing a Jack full of emptiness and non-being. I remembered hearing of such disappearances in prolonged vipassana meditations, but I had never experienced such a thing myself. I realized there must be a connection with my writing experience that morning; "searching for meaning." I remembered the words of the Prajñāpāramitā (Heart) sutra: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." I also remembered the incredible aftereffects of emptiness I had experienced years before.

Dark Matter and Nut: Perhaps what we are becoming aware of is that Being and non-being are continuing properties of all existence. In Buddhism it is described that when a monk discovers mu in his own person he has a deepening respect and cherishment for all of life. The Buddha called himself *Tahagata* which means no-man, his own non-existence. When we realize that we are continually coming in and out of Being, we develop a true appreciation for one another and let go of the fear of reflection, face to face, eye to eye, of one another. We can only truly see ourselves in the face of another. Martin Buber, who wrote *I and Thou*, was absorbed in true dialogue with another human being. I am convinced that he experienced mu in those dialogues, and thus could appreciate and share the full nature of Being with another.

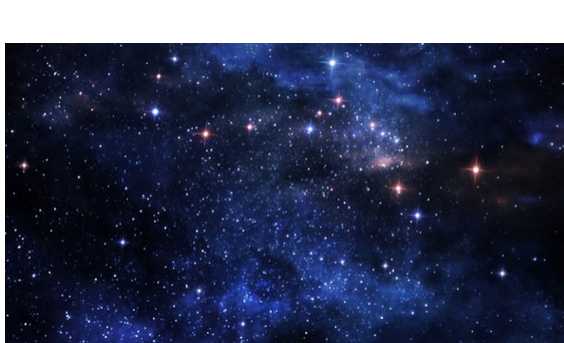


Strange that we have to experience emptiness to reach into the abundance of our own existence. In particle physics and modern astronomy, it is being revealed that the emptiness between particles and the emptiness of space are suffused with the potential for being and non-being. What is now called dark matter is a discovery that there is potential for being everywhere, even in what we have called emptiness. The ancient Egyptians depicted the starry sky as Nut a naked fecund goddess ripe with the potential for Being, and motherly protection. The Buddha said that the objects that you perceive are projections of your own consciousness. Perhaps when we become aware of mu we also become aware of our own potential for co-creation.



Musing: Possibly in broaching emptiness with the felt experience of our body-instrument we are coming to terms with our own mystery of being. The Buddha said there is no death, no absence of Being anywhere and anytime. As we become more adept at sharing our emptiness with one another, we become more resplendent with gratitude for life that has no ending. Here are some musings: Can emptiness be empty? Mu is not the disappearance of consciousness, but the extension of consciousness into all the dark (unknown) places. Can consciousness suffice emptiness? What are the relationships between gravity, and emptiness, and dark matter? When the zero was discovered, a whole new mathematics of is and isn't started to form. When humans learned to pause and frame their conversations with silent listening, a whole new form of communication developed called: "listening into Being." We now know that there is vast energy potential in empty space; what about the vast energy in our own emptiness? When we empty out our sense of

self, instead of filling the spaces with conditioned or past-centered mind, we give rise to the creative potential of our own emptiness and as physicist Laurence Krause states: "Nothing is headed straight towards us." Jack states: "Emptiness is not non-existence; do not fear!"



Open hands
Open mind
Open face
Open heart
Open creation

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