

THE MESSENGER IS THE MESSAGE: SPIRITUALITY AND SYSTEMIC FAMILY THERAPY

Sri Vasudeva talks with Imelda McCarthy

Introduction

In August 2001, I had the opportunity to interview Sri Vasudeva, my meditation teacher of three years, at his center in Trinidad. For some time I had been eager to talk with him about his experiences with family therapists and how he thought we might weave spirituality into our practices. This eagerness was triggered by a four main issues: 1) a growing interest and literature in the field on Spirituality, 2) a growing research on the importance of spirituality as a resource for many who come to us for professional help, 3) my own experiences of spiritual practice and the simultaneous incorporation of many of my learnings into work with clients and 4) the fact that Sri Vasudeva has now presented workshops in Ireland, England and Denmark to over 200 family therapists. To have someone of his background share his knowledge and experience, I imagined would be of interest to other therapists and it has been my happy privilege to be a bridge for this to happen.

Sri Vasudeva was born in Trinidad in 1954. In 1978, when he was twenty-four he underwent a forty-day period of intense yogic experiences which culminated in an experience of deep peace which has never left him to this day. He lives in a state of constant awareness, which is called by some, Self-Realisation or Enlightenment.

In 1988 he founded the Blue Star organization, which is an international, non-profit and non-sectarian group committed to holistic living. There are now groups in eight countries. In 1993 he retired from his regular secular working life and has dedicated his life to spreading the message of Self Empowerment and Self Transformation to the world. "Transform yourself and you will be a powerful influence in transforming the world around you," he says.

In his working life he has been a science teacher, a mechanical engineer and a plant and business manager. He has also been a teacher of yoga and meditation since the 1970's. Today, he continues to consult with organizations (NGO and business) in the areas of stress management and management dilemmas.

His teachings are based on the awakening and development of the spiritual centers within which ultimately leads to the realization of one's full potential. Wherever he travels his impact has been remarkable. A recent example of this was during a recent workshop for systemic therapists in Kensington Consultation Centre where there was such a response to him that the other presenters (Professor Sheila McNamee and Dr. Elspeth McAdam) at the event offered to forego their presentations and have him conduct the full three days.

Interview

Imelda McCarthy: Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. It is something I have looked forward to since your sessions with family therapy colleagues during the last year. As you aware from these sessions there has been a growing interest in Spirituality in the field and, as part of this interest you have now given workshops in Ireland, the UK and Denmark. Therefore, by way of an introduction could you say a little about your own aspirations for human development and what you think might be helpful for us therapists in relation to spirituality? You might also say why you have liked working with family therapists.

Sri Vasudeva: I am delighted to do this. As you know my goal is to develop the human person in every possible area. Therefore, I look towards the development of the total person, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. My goal is that a person should become Self Actualised or Self Realised and be able to utilise his/her full potential for their own happiness, the happiness of the community, of the country and of the world. So, happiness in people is what drives me, to be fulfilled inside and seek the fulfillment of the society.

I particularly like working with therapists as I feel that the spiritual dimension, if tapped, can bring greater results in their field. Far too many times I have seen people involved in all kinds of human development work where they promote human values and human development while in their own lives they seem to lack them. For example, people may teach about abuse in families, social consciousness or helping society but they themselves do not practice the teachings in their own homes. They might talk of the value of family relationships and family living but when you look into their own families you see that they themselves have not been able to deal with the issues they talk about.

In a way we are happy to compliment people outside of our families for their good work but when we come home to our families, whom we take for granted, we fail to pay such compliments. However, when one is more spiritually awakened, whether one is outside of the home or inside the home the values and the behaviour will remain consistent because they come from a place inside, a spiritual place. In this way the messenger becomes the message.

Imelda McCarthy: Could I ask you about that, you are talking about integrating the values you practice and the way in which you live your life ..

Sri Vasudeva: ..right

Imelda McCarthy: ..so are you saying that when you see people involved in social justice issues, in social consciousness issues and in helping people to have more harmonious relationships then that is also part of the spiritual domain as you see it?

Spirituality and Religion

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, I think the spirit of the human being is that part of us, where all the beautiful values are such as, kindness, compassion, sensitivity and equality lie. The source of goodness in the human being lies in the Spirit. If we think about this then we might ask, how can academic and professional training not include such a powerful domain of living and experiencing? Traditionally, some think of going to religion for direction in relation to moral and spiritual values. My thinking however, is that these do not belong solely to the domain of religion but can be included in a universal way in our academic and professional training programmes. These are very important values which must not be left out of any domain of our lives.

I always like to think that our spirituality is woven into the fabric of life and we cannot take it out. It is our very core, it is our very being and I think it should be embraced. I am not talking about religion for I see religion as a sub-part of spirituality. What I am talking about is a spirituality that has nothing to do with religion but has to do with the way we think, feel and act in the whole area of respect for life and in regard to moral and human values. That is how I see Spirituality.

Imelda McCarthy: Could you say a little bit more about that distinction because I think some people in the field might have a concern that in talking about spirituality one is bringing some kind of religious fervour into the activity of therapy.

Sri Vasudeva: What I would like to say is that we have always, as a society, associated spirituality with religion. So, it is commonplace then to think that once we start talking about spirituality we mean religion or religion is connoted. But, I see it differently. I see that whenever you get into a state of love, of peace, of compassion, of selflessness and of joy that you are really entering the spiritual domain.

You might be gardening for example and you get this wonderful feeling that inspires you to embrace the earth and what the earth is doing or how much the earth means to us. Then you are touching a dimension that binds you to the earth in a very special way. That for me is spirituality.

Or, even a sports person in the midst of the field gets such a high from what they are doing that it creates a joy that really cannot be compared with anything else, for me that is spirituality.

Or, even a person who is in a relationship with someone and the relationship reaches a height of being, of communication where the people feel more as one than two, for me that is spirituality.

Unity in Diversity, Co-Creation and Co-Construction

Spirituality is really getting to a deep sense of life and an experience of oneness in diversity, where all are connected. For me that too is spirituality. If we can take away the religious connotation from spirituality then we can have a better acceptance of what it is. Of course, we can be religious without being spiritual. But, I have also seen people in religion who have discovered spirituality, who have discovered spirituality in religion. Those who have been awakened to spirituality in religion, are transformed and they are able to embrace other religions easily. They see the unity in diversity. I have known, priests, for example, who have touched spirituality within their own religious denomination and they can come together so openly and wonderfully with those of other faiths. Interfaith dialogue comes naturally to them and they are ready to embrace others without losing their own

identity. So, I think true spirituality will give you that feeling of unity in diversity.

Imelda McCarthy: You are also talking there about when two or more people join together in a relationship and become as one that that is a very sacred moment, or time or activity.

Sri Vasudeva: Yes.

Imelda McCarthy: Taking this statement and stretching it a bit further I want to ask you about an idea. You talk a lot about the term, ‘co-creation’ and that is an idea that is very near to our hearts in the systemic and social constructionist field. So, could you talk a little about that, how individuals together in a therapy conversation, might come together and co-construct a spiritual conversation, from your point of view?

Sri Vasudeva: Yeah. How they can construct?

Imelda McCarthy: Yeah, co-construct, co-create a spiritual conversation in therapy.

Sri Vasudeva: To construct something means that we are using the mind. However, if we take the idea of oneness, that the highest relationship is the relationship of oneness where we share something, then that is beyond the mind. When we can feel a sort of unity in whatever we are doing or whoever we are with then, that is going beyond the mind. When this happens then I see it that we are in the domain of co-construction.

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Imelda McCarthy: Yes.

Sri Vasudeva: Therefore, as I see it, the ability to co-construct a spiritual conversation is premised on the ability to share a common understanding and language. If in doing that and if we are touching the same spirit within, then it is easy to communicate. The models needed all come so naturally. It is almost as if we are giving power to each other on a different level. Our appreciation and our respect for each other becomes realised. We can bring out the best in each other. We touch the spirit within and the spirit we share.

Spirit, is beyond the mind but includes the faculties of thinking and feeling. There is a sense of intelligence, of wisdom that is just beyond the mind and our thinking processes. When we feel this unity between us then we are in a domain where we also touch in spiritual awareness. If we are in this domain then we can co-construct wonderful images, thoughts, ideas that can help us to communicate together in very powerful way. When we co-create with others in spirit we are then using the mind and the ego as instruments in the service of this co-creation. On an individual level in this domain, we often have the sense that we can create things and feel a sense of empowerment. We are no longer defended from the other person or persons. We also feel a sense of responsibility for our part in the co-creation.

Responsibility and Co-Creation

Imelda McCarthy: In relation to us being responsible for our part in any co-creation, what would you say to people who are concerned about issues of social justice especially in relation to ‘responsibility’ and ‘co-creation’? What would you say to those who say that many relationships are unequal, that there is oppression, discrimination, apartheid and social injustice? Does that mean that people are also responsible for the co-creation that they are unjustly part of?

Sri Vasudeva: Well, what I would say is that within a society where all kind of forces are at play, there are many kind of egoistic, selfish or mental forces also at play. In these situations people are driven by their own selfishness, their own desires, by their own ambitions, by their own intentions. Therefore, we have to naturally assume that injustices will come. They will come because of people who are driven by their own selfishness. When we then come into this field and we see social injustice we can tell that this is not our creation. We did not create this but we also have to accept that it exists because so many kinds of minds exist in the world. So if injustice exists around me then it simply means that it must be a result of a larger collective thinking. However, if I embrace or accept the situation then it means that I am also supporting that kind of thinking.

Imelda McCarthy: yes.

Sri Vasudeva: But, if we can stay in a space inside of us, even though we are not going to like what we see around us then we are not really energising

that field. We are not contributing to that field. Furthermore, if we can help minds in that field to change, if we can do something to create a change even in the thinking of people then we are contributing towards dissipating this field or even eradicating this kind of thinking. Social justice issues for me are really reflections of where our collective thinking is. So long as we have people acting selfishly these issues will continue. Then as I said it becomes important whether we embrace the issue and let the issue take away our power and disturb us or whether we stand back and say we are not responsible for these issues around us. The next step is to think about what we can do to help to remove these issues or what we can do to prevent these issues. It is my view that we can do it best by awakening others in the field so that social injustice can be seen. If we can generate a collective power among those who see the injustices and want to make a change and then generate this energy in the larger collective field we can become a force to be reckoned with. This is what I think.

Language: Mind and Heart

Imelda McCarthy: Thank you for the clarification. It is interesting because what you say actually moves alongside what we are saying in systemic/social constructionist thinking. There are also other processes that you talk a lot about such as, ‘energy’ and ‘mind’. So, first let me ask you what you see is the connection between mind and language and then I will return to the question of energy later.

Sri Vasudeva: Language is the tool that we use, isn't it? We have different languages and we have different ways in which we use the tool. So, language for me is a way of constructing one's own thoughts and ideas and a way of communicating. But if the language we use is not in harmony with that of others, in other words do not speak the same language so to speak, then we have many difficulties in communication. So, the question arises as to how we find a language that we can communicate effectively with so that a person does not misinterpret what we say. There is a saying, “a thousand monks, a thousand religions”. I see each person as having their own interpretation of language. In a way they have their own language. For example, love might be uniquely understood by each person based on their own personal experiences of it so the word, ‘love’, means something different to each one of us. Thus there is always a potential difficulty with the spoken word.

Imelda McCarthy: In that case would you think love might be more fundamental than spoken language?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, and then we are speaking of a language of the heart.

Imelda McCarthy: Yes

Sri Vasudeva: I feel it is more fundamental. It takes you to a place which is beyond spoken language. If our language can be inspired by love then a lot more communication might be possible because there is something beyond the words, even if and when we misinterpret the words. We trust the love we sense and then communication can be easier as it is based on that trust.

Imelda McCarthy: So, if we can talk on a heart level then more is possible?

One of the things you said about the groups of family therapists that you have met, was that they were heart people and that you felt at home

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, yes.

Family Therapists as Heart People

Imelda McCarthy Could I ask you to say a bit more about a language of the heart particularly in relation to your experiences of the sessions with family therapists. I think you said they were heart people?

Sri Vasudeva: Well, take my first session in Ireland, when I walked into the room and I began to speak immediately I felt empowered to speak. That empowerment can only come when people are listening with their hearts. So, I felt empowered, I felt that they were truly listening and as I began to speak I could feel their heart energy. I could feel their empathy which I always like in a group. This brings the best out in me and that is what I found.

When I took them into meditation it was really wonderful to see because we meditated on the heart. It was wonderful to see the kind of energies that came out in the group. When I spoke about loving, loving themselves and loving the environment, the kind of energies which emerged from in the group were simply marvelous. So, even without their speaking to me I could feel the kind of listening they were doing. They were listening from the heart and I

could feel the kind of love that was evoked in their hearts for themselves, for their life journey and also for society. There was a marvelous non-verbal communication that was taking place beyond words. In the end when I listened to the sharing it just validated what I was experiencing. So I could tell that they had wonderful hearts.

The Mind and Ego

Imelda McCarthy: Could I now return to the mind and ask you about a term you used a few minutes ago and that is the term, 'ego'? It seems to me that you use it in a very different way from its use in psychology, could you say a bit about how you are using the term and how it is connected with 'mind'?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, OK. The ego is the part of us that involves the mind but in some of the Eastern traditions the Self (Spirit or Higher Self) is defined a little differently. The Self is like an observing part of us. It is often called, a loving observer, a loving witness and it is this Self that employs the mind and ego as it were. It employs the intellect, the imagination, the memory and so on. Descartes said, "I think therefore I am". When we begin to think some kind identity starts to develop. We can make distinctions. So, we can say that there is a part of our mind which when it begins to work develops a sense of identity such as, "I am John and I have this or that personality".

The sense of identity that arises when you begin to think is what I call the 'ego'. This is distinct from the Spirit or Self that is eternal and not engaged in time-based consciousness. For example, if I am in conversation with you there is a part of me that is observing everything and I can feel my mind in the conversation, I can see the shape of my thoughts and I can listen to my voice. There is a part of me that is observing everything and yet feels detached, lovingly detached. This is 'the Self' and is different to the ego. Unlike the Self the ego gets involved in thinking and all that goes with thinking. When we see it like this then it is the ego that can be hurt but not the Self or Spirit because the Self is always a loving observer. The ego can be in pain because our sense of who we are or are trying to be becomes offended in some way. The Self will never be in pain. I don't know if defined in this way it makes sense?

Imelda McCarthy: It does to me and I think that it is interesting when we think in this way as it offers more options not only in our daily lives but also when we are doing therapy. If we think like this then we do not see people as being trapped in the situation they are in. There is always their Spirit which is never embroiled in the situation, as it were. However, there are a few questions I can also ask you around that. When you quote Descarte's phrase, 'I think therefore I am', you are referring to the world of dualistic thinking and presumably the ego belongs to this world? However, we would say, from a social constructionist point of view, that you can have many different kinds of selves which are brought forward through language in interaction. Therefore, at that level of mind and social being there is no fixed self, personality, identity or ego.

Sri Vasudeva: Well, OK, I can understand that because all these selves (egos, identities) are constructs of the mind ..

The Self and the bringing forth of 'selves'

Imelda McCarthy: Yes ... saying that these many 'selves' are constructs of the mind fits with what we would call, 'constructivism'. However, again returning to social constructionism, it would stress that we co-produce mind and these selves between us. They are all joint products of relationships brought forward through interaction in language both at a micro level between two or more people and at the larger social level.

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, and I would like to take this a little further. We can also see these selves as the Self manifesting in its infinite diversity. Also these selves must have a relationship with each other as well. They must exist in some unity otherwise the personality of the person would seem too radically dispersed. This is not to say the personality is fixed in any way, but without a relationship between them there would be chaos rather than a coherence that we recognize as a person over time. So to my mind there must be some relationship between all these selves, there must be something that unifies all these and is also involved in all these selves.

Imelda McCarthy: As in unity in diversity?

The Higher Self and the Therapeutic Domain

Sri Vasudeva: Right , right, right, So, while it is possible to have an infinite number of selves they are also manifestations of a unity ...

Imelda McCarthy: ... that is more stable and more unchanging and which gives them coherence? Now, what would you say to people who might say that the construction of this Self is just another construction of the mind, of language, of relationship?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, we can say that and the only way to know that it (the Self) exists is to actually experience it. Those who have experienced it talk about the possibility but apart from that we can always say that it is another construct of the mind and so on. One can never know.

Imelda McCarthy: Because it is unexplainable and indefinable?

Sri Vasudeva; Yes, unless you go to what is called a transcendental level beyond the mind you cannot say if it exists. The only way that you can know if it exists is to have a direct experience of it. A direct experience of it will only tell you if it exists.

Imelda McCarthy: So, if we bring all of this into the domain of therapy where do you see it fits?

Sri Vasudeva: Before we go on to that I want to continue with this a little bit. It is my experience that the mind also comes from the Self. In this way the mind as well as the selves are actually limited in regard to the Self which is unlimited. So, we can then ask, how can anything that is limited really understand that which is unlimited? How can the mind or these many selves understand the Self from which they came?

Imelda McCarthy: As I understand it also, you are not talking about this larger Self being 'limited' either within a human being or to an individual human being. You are saying that the Self or Spirit is part of a much larger schema of which we are manifestations or sparks, to use your words.

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, yes

Imelda McCarthy: This is not something that is just inside each one of us but is also between us and around us. This is interesting now as the Self or

Spirit constitutes the context for mind and expresses itself through the mind of an individual who is also a manifestation of that larger Spirit.

The Self in Therapy

Sri Vasudeva: What was the other question again, how do I see all this in the therapy field?

Imelda McCarthy: Yes, given that you think this and that we in the therapy field are communing with people in relationships, how do you see what you have been saying coming into the therapeutic domain?

Sri Vasudeva; This is a nice question as well because it comes down to the basic idea that if you are a therapist dealing with people and their issues but you are not sitting in the right place within then you will be caught up in their issues. One has to be really careful because I think there is a fine line when it comes to being judgmental. I also believe that if a therapist really wants to be effective then they need to be able to go to a place inside where they will not be influenced by the fluctuations of the mind, emotions or constructs.

So you might ask, how do you view a situation without being judgmental? How do you develop the ability to see issues clearly without making judgments and not define them based on your own experiences? A another question would be, how can you generate love and compassion? I use the word 'generate' because I feel that we can all do it together, it is another co-creation. Let us say we see someone and we don't feel a sort of chemistry with them, how do we generate compassion, how do we generate a feeling of love and compassion?

I believe that we human beings can transmit something in the way we interact, something that is subtle and not definable by physical standards. We generate this in a conversation. Someone can feel whether you are welcoming them to speak or not. Someone can feel your love for them. They can feel positive emotions surrounding them created by you. As I see it a therapist has to have all this and learn to go beyond judgment. So, even if a client reflects something that you don't like in your own life you are still able to show compassion. My belief is that unless we have touched the core of our own being and have gone into a place that we would call transcendental, a

beautiful place inside, we do not really know what we are transmitting to another person at a subtle level. We cannot know if we are not continuing to judge them or not?

I know that in the university and in the training of therapists we try get therapists that are really non-judgmental, who can really be empowering, giving energies to people and bringing out the best in them. But, as I see it this is not easy to do. People may still not see the subtle attitudes they may have and these are not caught through our examination systems or even through our training and practice.

Imelda McCarthy: I think we would see that these subtle attitudes are seen through non-verbal behaviour.

Sri Vasudeva: Right

Imelda McCarthy: But you would also say that the transmission of these subtle attitudes occurs more by way of an energy, would you?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, yes.

Imelda McCarthy: It is energy transmitted through non-verbal communication?

The Transmission of Subtle Energies

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, and I see that as being important because I have met all kinds of people in the fields of social work, therapy and human development and they care up to a certain extent. However, I have often seen that when they meet challenges then you see parts of them that you didn't see before or actually realise were there. They have personal and professional issues which emerge. You may not see these in the normal course of events. They may do their duty well but when they are really challenged you may see all sorts of things that are subtly there and that have not been seen before.

Another factor is that you cannot really cultivate human values by going to a university alone. These often arise through life transforming experiences ... for

example, you might have had a grandmother who really made a great impression on you. Just by being with her a lot of compassion and wisdom came naturally to you. So, life skills do not develop only through academic or professional training. I think we need to select therapists who carry values that are necessary for dealing with people and their issues.

We always need to see more humanity in therapists and social carers because in this world we are still caught up in the economies of things. What I mean by this is that we may need to train a certain number of trainers and therapists each year to take care of a population regardless of what qualities they show. When we do this there is a danger that we remain caught up in an academic process and a professionalism without heart.

So the question arises, how can we get the heart into it? How can we really awaken human values in our training for therapists? As I said before, I feel the best therapists are those who have come into the profession not necessarily for money but who really have that heart. Those kinds of people are natural to the field.

Imelda McCarthy: I think that probably most therapists who come into the field do come in for heart reasons, their care for people and their care about the societies that they live in and so on.

Some of these things could be seen as controversial, for example the point you made about those with unresolved subtle issues and who therefore might retain some of the prejudices associated with those. I don't know if you are aware that in therapy training programmes students have to undergo rigorous supervision that helps them with those kinds of issues, but it seems to me that you might be implying something different?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, I agree with you and that is really wonderful but it is also like having a guard to guard the guard, you know? Who will guard the guard? For example, who is to say that the supervisors are also free [of prejudice].

Imelda McCarthy: But how do you get out of that infinite regress?

Sri Vasudeva: We can only hope for the best in a society but I feel that these people are born. There are certain people who are gifts to humanity who are born with compassion and certain qualities and if we can have them in any country, if we can have them in any university

that they will really inspire the field.

Imelda McCarthy: What would they look like, these people?

Sri Vasudeva: It is not a question of looking

Imelda McCarthy: What would they be like?

Sri Vasudeva: Possessing what qualities? If you look, in your own field, at some of the people who really inspired the field you may see a person of real heart who was able to stand up against the challenges they faced in their lives. In these people we see more than professional training, more than an academic education. You wish you could have more of them born, like a Gandhi or a Mother Teresa for example, people who are able to touch a deeper level of thinking and feeling. These are the people who really inspire.

Once I read that the history of the world is the history of great men and women. If we have these kinds of people in any culture then we can awaken that same consciousness again. For example if you have in a university a great professor then you will find that there will be more and more people who will come out and will shine and be distinguished in their field. That is why I say that we have to be fortunate as a country and as a people to have some who are naturally born like this. We can try to cultivate it but it is never as good as the natural product.

Humility: Accepting current limitations!

Imelda McCarthy: But for those who may not feel that they have it naturally how might they cultivate it?

Sri Vasudeva: We need, for example, the best intellectual training we can have to create the best kind of programmes and to select the best students we want to train as therapists. However, even though we can do this we also have to know that they are nevertheless all limited. I say this, because we also have to ask, what is the reason why we have so many social ills? Even though we have people who will take care of them we still cannot control these ills. So, in my opinion it shows us that we are still limited in what we can do and achieve. As a people, as a society I do not think that we have reached a place yet where we can say that we have found the ultimate solution, that we

have the ultimate therapists or that we have the ultimate society. I can't see that anywhere. My feeling is that when we have the ultimate in a particular field that person is a very special person. Or, when we are in a position to provide the environment for the creation of this 'ultimate' person then that will be a person who will be able to express the full range of human values.

I think we see it in a Mother Teresa or a Gandhi or those who were able to bring out the best within themselves and within society. I think that the rest, no matter how great they are they are still a few steps away from what we need in society to create transformation. If we are to create a better world then we need people of real integrity, awareness and consciousness who can heartfully share their energy and who also educate humanity. We need educators in the world today who can really help to lift the standard of thinking, consciousness and energy in the world. We need those kind of people. I am optimistic as my feeling is that we are progressing as a society every day and that those people will come into the world. I feel that life itself will send those people into the world to help us with that.

Imelda McCarthy: Do you think that there is something we can do about it in the meantime?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, I think if we work sincerely the help will come to us. It is almost as if you are creating a project and a part is missing but you are so sincere in creating this project that life will send it. That is my belief because that is what I have seen in my own situation, that when I need things and I am really sincere in what I am using it for it comes.

Imelda McCarthy: You are laying down quite a big challenge to people who work with other people and in particular those in distress.

Sri Vasudeva: OK, I am going to stop you a little there to say that we can always aspire to be the best that we can be. The love for the field of humanity or the field of social consciousness is a wonderful thing as through these we are helping to elevate society. But, we also need to accept our limitations. We are not the best yet but no matter how far we can go in our training and we have to be honest to say, there is more, there, we have to learn more. We have to be humble in the field and know, that after all the learnings, after all the education, there is still more to learn. This is the sort of humility we need, to become like a child in our field of knowledge. So, the

aspiration to help humanity, the aspiration to become trained, of wanting to be helpful to humanity and to serve humanity are wonderful aspirations and should never die. They will take us far. However, the ability to say that we don't know everything, the ability to say that we still lack expertise in a deeper sense and the humility to say that we are willing to learn from every situation and every person, that is what is required, I think.

Imelda McCarthy: That reminds me of what you said some time ago about our frames often being too narrow when we just concern ourselves with individual and social problems. I think that is what you are saying again here when you talk about a sense of awe and humility in the face of everything that we encounter and everybody that we encounter. As I understand it this is a key to developing our own potential and that of the people we meet in therapy. I am trying to simplify what you are saying but I don't want to over simplify it

Sri Vasudeva: No, it is a sense of humility and the idea that we don't have all the knowledge that we need at this stage in our societies to really take care of all the issues or even to create the 'ultimate therapist'. We cannot also really create them through professional or educational training as we have to be awakened to a new sense of consciousness, a sense of values, a sense of being that will give us the power and the tools to help people and those in need. So, I am saying that we need an honesty to know where we are in all of this. Even though we have our professional training, we can still feel helpless in certain situations. We have to be able to say, yes, we don't have the ultimate answers even though we have all the training that we need. So, the ability to be open, to learn and to grow in every situation and develop even in situations which may challenge us may be the next step in helping us to grow. Being able to say that, is what I think is extremely valuable in a good therapist.

The Seven Spiritual Centres

Imelda McCarthy: During the sessions you also introduced us to the seven major spiritual centres in the body and I have heard you say that if you are to work with other people that you need to have some of those centres open. So, for therapists what would you say about that.

Sri Vasudeva: This understanding of the seven spiritual centres is a field

that is now developing. It came from the ancient science of energy in India, Kundalini. The experiences I have had had with these centres and this Energy is beyond intellectual training or reading. The experiences have really transformed my way of thinking and my own energy. Through the spiritual discipline I followed I naturally found these centres inside and I know that if these centres are awakened in any person this can transform their way of thinking, their way of feeling and their vision. It can transform their whole person, their whole being. If a therapist can experience this kind of transformation in these energy centres then I am sure that their work will be much more empowering.

I speak principally about the heart. If your heart centre is awakened you get a feeling that you are living in a beautiful energy of love, I cannot describe it. Your words, your touch are more wonderful. Your look is more energising. The whole idea in experiencing the heart centre is that you feel that love is part of your being, that you don't have to go looking for love or asking for love, you feel fulfilled in your own love. The ability to share this love is what the heart centre gives to you. That is what I have felt in my own experience.

Then at the throat centre, you actually feel that when it is awakened your voice is empowered. You feel that your voice carries a different kind of energy, a different quality. When you speak you can feel energy coming through the words and you can see the effect it has on another. It is a powerful centre in communication.

When the eyebrow centre is open it gives you a different vision in life. It gives you more power over your mind and your thoughts. It also gives you the feeling of being a detached observer to your thoughts. So, your ability to concentrate on any particular can help you to guide another person.

These three centres in particular are wonderful in work for humanity - an open heart, an empowered voice, great vision and a powerful mind. Because when we are awakened ourselves we become empowered and can actually transmit energy to another to awaken their spiritual energy. I feel this is the contribution that I can make, awakening people to this sense of energy and consciousness within themselves.

Imelda McCarthy: I think you are right, from my own limited experience of working energetically with family therapists. They have very strong experiences of those centres, which brings me back to a point that maybe all therapists are born like that

Sri Vasudeva: Yes

Imelda McCarthy: and they end up in the field, because when you were talking about this initially, I was thinking, "oh my goodness, what do we do about this if we are not born to it" but in a way maybe people who go into the therapy field ARE born for that field.

Sri Vasudeva: Absolutely, absolutely, I can agree on that

Imelda McCarthy: I think people might breath a sigh of relief at that!

Sri Vasudeva: (laughs) Well, in a way that is nice because if we can attract the people who are born therapists so to speak, their training then is just a formality because if you are natural to it then you will take the journey very easily and you will look forward to developing the field even further.

Imelda McCarthy: You have among your own students people who are therapists of various descriptions, have you seen anything in your connection with them which struck you particularly in relation to their being therapists?

Sri Vasudeva: What I see and what I like very much in the people who come to me who are therapists is the humility I spoke about earlier. The idea that their field maybe still growing and that there is more that they can add to the dimension of knowledge that exists in the field is a kind of humility that I love. This is what I have seen in most of the professionals that come to me who want to learn more. Their question to me is usually, how can I touch deeper levels of consciousness and being within myself. Then when I see them touch these levels I can see the transformation in them and then I see the impact it has in the field.

That makes me fulfilled because this is what I feel we need to do. If we

can touch that energy and consciousness then the contribution we can make to field of knowledge is great. I have seen in the people coming to me the discovery of deeper experiences of Self inside together with an awakening energy and consciousness. I see the creative work they are doing in their field and that makes me very happy. The humility that I see in them is marvelous.

Imelda McCarthy: There is an interesting phenomenon in our field at the moment which relates to what you are saying. We are talking more and more about the ‘Self of the therapist’ and there have been some questions about what that means. You have also been asked about that in Copenhagen in terms of the danger of reifying this 'Self', the Higher Self, the Self with a capital 'S' ..

Sri Vasudeva: ... yes

Imelda McCarthy: ... and if we do this we are in a way just creating another little self because this 'Self' is beyond description, it's undefinable, it's ineffable, it is transcendental and it is shared amongst us, it does not exist just inside of us. It is also between us.

Sri Vasudeva: Right

Imelda McCarthy: I think even Bateson was pointing in this direction around the time he died. It seems to me that when he was talking about an ecology of mind, an ecology of ideas that he had more than just our understanding of mind, in mind as it were. I think it is no accident that his posthumous book was entitled, A Sacred Unity. In both his books, ‘Towards an Ecology of Mind’ and ‘A Sacred Unity’ it was the synergy between people, ‘the pattern which connects’ that he was pointing to. Like you, he seemed to be hinting more at Spirit than mind especially in the last work. In addition, the beauty of what you have highlighted for me is that it is not only within us as immanence but also can be experienced between us as transcendence. When we touch this level of Spirit we touch something that is much deeper. We experience what is called synergy or synchronicity.

Coming back to the field of systemic family therapy I think that we would have experiences of connecting to Spirit when working with clients. When we work like that we actually do touch that deep level at times. My great

friend and colleague, Nollaig Byrne, has called those moments, moments of communion. In these moments we have an experience of touching something that is larger than 'mind' and goes way beyond each individual's discrete embodiment. As you have said it is a wonderfully creative process where ideas and solutions emerge spontaneously. For me it resonates with much of what we tried to do in our Fifth Province team. I suppose when this happens it is what we call the magic of therapy.

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, I like that. That is when we touch that Higher Self that embraces all of us. OK, just coming back to that Self, in my own experience, when a group touches that Self the whole process lifts to a remarkable level and as you say all kinds of solutions come. You are touching something very, very sacred, very precious. Sometimes everyone feels it and that is remarkable. I am sure it is every therapist's dream that such a process can be experienced.

Imelda McCarthy: Yes and we all become present to each other as well as to something that is larger than any of us individually. What we are talking about here brings me back to something we touched on earlier in relation to subtle energies and presence. Could I ask you about how you might see this question of presence, 'therapist presence'?

Presence

Sri Vasudeva: Yes each person carries a presence that comes from their energy, not their physical energy but the energy of their emotions and thoughts and their spirituality you might say. Each person carries it like a signature ..

Imelda McCarthy: Like a thumbprint?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, like a thumbprint and that presence can be empowering or it can even be depressing. We feel it all the time when someone comes into our field. So, yes we do carry a presence and I feel that the more sensitive we are to what we are carrying the more we can realise how we interact with people in a non-verbal way and how much more we can communicate through presence.

Imelda McCarthy: Do you see that this could be incorporated into training programmes?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, but it must come under non-verbal communication. It must come under some kind of dynamics of energy and interaction that is non-verbal.

Imelda McCarthy: I can imagine that people would want to know what you mean by that and what they could do about it if they were thinking that they would like to do more about this?

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, again it is more about the openness to the field of subtle energy and these centres that I spoke about. We have to be open to this knowledge and I think that the therapists I have met are open to it. However, we also have to think of those who are the intellectuals in the field, those who formulate how the programmes will be. This is so that the training programmes can be more open to this field of subtle energy in human dynamics and to being able to create programmes that involve the development of these.

Imelda McCarthy: Like meditation?

Sri Vasudeva: Certainly, through meditation

Imelda McCarthy: And knowledge of the various energy disciplines

Meditation and Energy Disciplines in Self Care

Sri Vasudeva: Yes, right and I look forward to that coming into the field because we can say that we feel this energy inside but we need to translate this into a way that can be accepted by the creators of academic and training programmes

Imelda McCarthy: And I suppose the beauty of that is that it doesn't only develop or progress one's spirituality but also it also enhances health ...

Sri Vasudeva: In every aspect ...

Imelda McCarthy: It stops burn out, deals with stress, etc

Sri Vasudeva: Because we have these seven centres and each is connected with a particular aspect of the human being, the mind, the emotions, vitality,

sexuality, grounding and spirituality. It is marvelous. My feeling is that this is the science of the future - human energetics and subtle energy fields.

Imelda McCarthy: From my point of view in having come through the field and then encountering these ideas and practices it has been like the completion of a circle, not the closing of a circle but the completion of a circle ..

Sri Vasudeva: Right ...

Imelda McCarthy: and they have put a lot of things in perspective.

Sri Vasudeva : I hope you share that with the field.

Imelda McCarthy: Before we end is there anything else you would like to say or is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think might be important.

Sri Vasudeva: No, I am happy that you have asked these questions and I am open to all contributions that I can make in the system. But, I would love to see some sort of programme or training that can be offered to therapists that takes into account some of these things that we have spoken about, especially the energy centres.

Imelda McCarthy: I agree and I thank you for this conversation.

Sri Vasudeva: Thank you. It has been wonderful as always.

END

