

# BUILDING INTEGRAL COACHING CANADA

## *A Practice Journey*

Joanne Hunt

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**ABSTRACT** This article provides a glimpse into some of the practices and teachings fundamental to the founders of Integral Coaching Canada, Inc. These practices form the backbone for the structure and design of their coaching method and coach training programs. This article will provide an opportunity to look AS the founders from a more personal perspective through memoir, with integral insights. Laura Divine's Zen and tai chi practices and Joanne Hunt's Zen and writing practices are explored as deep sources of their work in the world. This article speaks to their separate and now co-mingled lives of practice, and the lineages that sourced their building of a coaching school that is more like a martial arts academy than traditional learning program. Some of the stories and principles taught to them by their teachers—Lenzie Williams and Natalie Goldberg—are also shared. The guiding influence of integral theory in their lives of practice is also illuminated. The article concludes with the story of how Joanne and Laura met and came to build their company.

**Key words:** integral coaching; integral life practice; tai chi; writing practice; Zen Buddhism

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Change is the basis of human life, so don't attach yourself to birth or death, continuation or discontinuation. Just live right in the middle of the flow of change, where there is nothing to hold on to. How do you do this? Just be present and devote yourself to doing something.

—*Katagiri Roshi*<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean to live a life of practice? What happens when you start to connect to each moment arising in each day as part of your practice field? You start becoming more and more awake in your life. You cannot help it. Each moment fresh, a new state. Another chance to be present—another opportunity to wake up, as states uniquely provide. As you swing your legs over the side of the bed and head to the bathroom, or to the kitchen to put the coffee on, you are already in the practice field. Sometimes we call them habits. But if we are awake to the moment, we can hold them as part of a practice life. Am I present in my body as I head to the kitchen? As I scoop out spoonfuls of coffee into the container of my stove-top espresso maker, am I actually there for the activity? Am I aware of the tightness in my belly or sleep in my eyes? Or does coffee somehow get made without me being truly present? Driving your car over a familiar route and all of a sudden you arrive at Loblaws, grocery list written on the back of an envelope next to you on the passenger seat, and you realize that you were thinking about other things and were not really present for the drive. Five traffic lights ago, where did you disappear?

Being in practice calls for waking up (horizontal state-stage development). The awakening of states is the portal to waking up itself—the opportunity to be embodied, present to the present, awake to the “what is” of this

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moment. The *making coffee* parts and the *hour of tai chi form correction* parts, the *being present to your wife as she speaks to you* parts, and the *twenty minutes of focus intensity training* parts. All of these can be practices in an awakened life. Every moment offers a fresh opportunity to practice, to work with your awareness, to wake up to your unique self, to the people twinkling around you, and to the shimmering world giving birth to you, to itself, right now.

Being in practice calls for growing up (vertical structure-stage development). The opportunity to see each moment through ever-increasing numbers of perspectives, to view “what is” through ever-expanding knowledge of consciousness living itself; to understand through greater perspectival capacities what is happening as we awaken; to know that the great chain of being is unfolding and recognizing the patterns as they emerge; to know through our subtle and causal minds, through our expanded capacities to Look AS one another, and through the seeing of more and more truths as they become available to each of us that evolution is occurring all around us, in us, and through us. And as we grow up there are wider and wider vistas through which we apprehend this incredible unfolding. A dedicated life of practice strengthens and enables our *waking up* and our *growing up*.

Our Integral Coaching® Certification Program (ICCP) calls for and cultivates this awakening and development in a coach’s life and on behalf of an “other”—a client—and their life of practice. At the beginning of the ICCP, students often ask us how many hours outside of class will be required for their coach training. Our response is, “All of them.” We can spell out the approximate number of hours of Integral Life Practice (ILP) required, or hours of study to support assignments that are part of the curriculum, or coaching hours necessary with clients. But that does not begin to tell the story of starting down this road, of becoming part of the Integral Coaching® lineage. Why? Because you could actually spend 30 minutes in meditation and the quality of it could range from, “I wasn’t there at all; I was daydreaming, composing emails in my head, and checking my watch until the time was up” to “I fully dropped in and attended to my practice as completely as I could, returning to my breath a 100 times, committing and recommitting to being awake to this arising moment, and then this one, and then this one.” From the outside you could look at two people sitting, facing the wall, butts on *zafus* (meditation cushion), legs crossed on *zabutons* (meditation mat), eyes downcast, and you could watch those same two people get up after 30 minutes. They do not look dissimilar from afar, but if you were to be in conversation with each of them over time, you would feel the distinctly different nature of their practices.

The person who puts in the required sitting time, but is not actually there for it has not started to stabilize their discursive mind. So, engaging in sitting in this way can be an activity, not a mindful practice. It is a task like other items on a to do list—it has a start and a finish. Next. Next. However, the person who is actively engaged in being awake for their sitting, intent on returning their wild mind again and again to rest on the breath has started to cultivate a way to work with the mind.

This engaged practice impacts neurobiology, starts to create and carve new pathways of being and knowing and relating to body, self, spirit, space, and time. This awakened practice enables bodies and minds to draw on that sitting practice during the rest of the day, not in a way that tries to continually connect back to the 30 minutes in order to “be spacious” during a particularly tough meeting or when someone cuts you off on the highway. It does not work like that exactly. In engaged practice, you find that the space or equanimity starts to rise up unannounced throughout the day. It starts appearing here and there. That is what happens when you are engaged in a deliberate practice of trying to be present. Ultimately you find that presence itself is a spontaneous event, a sort of quieted energy, clear and reliable. Stable. A spaciousness that is not sought or grasped at, but naturally occurs. And then you notice that it is present—you do not have to chase it down. In fact, chasing

is fruitless. If you practice diligently over time, the effects show up. As my teacher, Natalie Goldberg, loves to quote from Zen Master Dogen, “When you walk in the mist, you get wet.”

The person who has “put in” their 30 minutes of sitting daydreaming—which I highly recommend as a practice, but not during sitting—does not have a body-mind that has built the neural pathways to know of this stable ground of being, so the appearance of it during the rest of their day is not noticed or accessed. The body is not awake to this place. The mind does not know of this place. As T.S. Eliot (1943) aptly stated, “Not known, because not looked for” (p. 59). Embodiment of the capacities built in an active and awake sitting practice is noticeable in coaches who take on being fully awake in their lives.

We often say, “You can’t cram for the final test of becoming an Integral Coach™. Either you are embodied or you are not.” This requires fundamental shifts in a way of being; it is not a way of tips, tools, and techniques. This way of life requires expanding on all fronts: ways of seeing, perceiving, being, enacting, experiencing, interpreting, translating, and transforming. There is no cramming for a martial arts black belt test the night before. You have to have done the practice, put in the hours. Repeatedly. Over time. With ongoing form correction, deepening your ways of perceiving and being, the night before the black belt test, there is only resting well, being in your practice, and showing up the next day. Nothing extra.

This is the space from which we developed Integral Coaching Canada Inc., a place of practice and embodiment; a place of freedom and fullness; a place of science and soul; a place of compassion and decisive action; a place to learn how to more effectively alleviate suffering in the world. And all of this from a space or altitude that could hold and understand increasing levels of complexity, perspectives, causes, and conditions. This space included our internal demand for an integrated system and our requirement for holism, not just being present to a form or structure, but being present to as many as possible, and finally, translating what we had come to understand so that it could be useful to coaches in service of future clients.

In this article, I will explore Laura Divine’s and my journey of integrating dedicated study, practice, and development into the field of coaching. This includes how we built more of a martial arts academy for coaches than a traditional school or conventional form of training. I will speak to this practice field in terms of the deeper development associated with being able to work with the complexity of our Integral Coaching® model. I will reflect on Laura’s Zen practice and profound practice of tai chi; the coming together of my Zen practice and intense writing practice; and how all of these practices informed the development of our curriculum through an integral lens of understanding. I will also speak about death—because that is what I do—and about how Laura and I met and came to build our school.

This article is more of a memoir than a scholarly article, more of a story than an analysis, more personal than professional, more musing than asserting. In the other articles in this issue you were Looking AT our Integral Coaching® work. You will have already seen in these Looking AT articles that the structure-stage capacities required to take in complex perspectives—including being able to Look AS how another person Looks AT the world—is required in our coach training programs. In this article you can wander into our interiors, Looking AS one of us (Joanne) as I attempt to represent both of us (Laura and Joanne). You will look out through these eyes in snapshots—the way that looking often occurs. There is no chronological order. The following pages hold a structure that is closer to *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (Suzuki, 1970), with some sections standing alone as contributing threads to our practice lives and other sections serving to bring various elements together. There is space for your own thoughts and ruminations. I will not explicitly draw all the connections between how each section’s topic directly relates to our work, our coaches, and our clients. As in the Zen tradition, an-

swers are very rarely directly provided or explained. What is your experience? How is your practice? What are you noticing? There is time for you to form your own thoughts in the cracks and crevices of this article, peruse your own linkages, and fall in love with the wild mind. May you find yourself and be served well as you peek in the window of this lineage of coaches, which aims to support the integral unfolding of ourselves and each other, alleviating suffering as we grow up and wake up together.

## **Integral Coaching Canada, Inc.: A Martial Arts Academy**

We built our training programs using a martial arts model based on practice, lineage, sinking into form, form correction, and embodiment assessment versus academic testing. And, of course, part of this training is about understanding the form, the structures, and the “map” that underlies Integral Coaching®. Our work calls to people who want to drop deeply into their lives and the lives of their clients. To those who do not just want to “do unto others” with their coaching, but want to profoundly explore their own lives, perceptions of self and others, and related shadows.

Over the years, as our training program has become well known in terms of its developmental rigor and embodiment requirements, we have attracted very skilled practitioners and people already living lives of profound practice. We often get calls from coaches certified through other coaching schools asking, “I am already a certified coach from another school; can’t I get advanced standing and take a short course with you? I’m sure I could just apply whatever materials you have.” That would be like walking into a Shaolin Kung Fu Monastery as a long-time tai chi practitioner and making a request of the senior teacher in a lineage that you have not yet known, “Can I join the advanced class because I am sure I’ll catch on and I want to start teaching your Kung Fu method within the year?” Uh, no.

Every person who enters our program starts at the beginning. As in development, we all start at square one—you cannot skip stages, as Ken Wilber so often reminds us. Enrolled in our programs are certified coaches, psychologists, black belt quantum jujitsu teachers, spiritual teachers, yoga teachers, rolfers, therapists, executives, managers, assistant deputy ministers, professors, and graduate students. They all start at the beginning. As a matter of fact, when we first started our partnership with the Integral Institute, there were a few people who said, “I’m sure we already know Integral Coaching® since we have studied the theory and have been applying it in our lives. We should be able to read all your binders and then teach your program.” Uh, no.

There are many ways of knowing. What we have developed in Integral Coaching Canada requires not just “knowing about” but “knowing as”—integrating it, making it come alive, making it present and real. This is embodiment. In order to embody the form of Integral Coaching®, you need to engage in deep practice with it every day. You need to immerse your whole self and drop into the middle of your life, birth, break, rage, and rail against change, against that which has been longed for in all your waking moments. You need to do the practice for five months in the *Foundation & Apprenticeship Module*, then you need to drop all the way down in the nine month *Embodiment & Certification Module*. You need to commit to your life and to your development through daily practice. Being awake and in skillful service to self and others requires all of you and ends up “costing not less than everything” (Eliot, 1943, p. 59).

Thich Nhat Hanh’s poem “I Will Say I Want It All” (1999, p. 177) poignantly illustrates what it takes to adeptly contribute to another’s development. This kind of transformation—in small and large ways—is what Integral Coaching Canada is called to in support of students and clients. And, as we transcend and include, growing up from our current ways of being to our new ways of seeing and walking in the world, we stand next to each others’ birthing and know that we “will be there to contemplate his new being.”

*I Will Say I Want It All*

If you ask how much do I want,  
I'll tell you that I want it all.  
This morning, you and I  
and all men  
are flowing into the marvelous stream  
of oneness.

Small pieces of imagination as we are,  
we have come a long way to find ourselves  
and for ourselves, in the dark, the illusion  
of emancipation.

This morning, my brother is back from his  
long adventure.  
He kneels before the altar,  
his eyes full of tears.  
His soul is longing for a shore to set anchor at  
(a yearning I once had).  
Let him kneel there and weep.  
Let him cry his heart out.  
Let him have his refuge there for a thousand years,  
enough to dry all his tears.

One night, I will come  
and set fire to his shelter,  
the small cottage on the hill.  
My fire will destroy everything  
and remove his only life raft after a shipwreck.

In the utmost anguish of his soul,  
the shell will break.  
The light of the burning hut will witness  
his glorious deliverance.  
I will wait for him beside the burning cottage.  
Tears will run down my cheeks.  
I will be there to contemplate his new being.  
And as I hold his hands in mine  
and ask him how much he wants,  
he will smile and say that he wants it all—  
just as I did.

When you come to our school, we want it all—for you, for your clients, for all of us. From the moment you enter the door, from the first song that reaches in and plucks open your heart, you join or re-commit to the practice journey. At the beginning, you are doing the practices and coaching and staying true to the form. And

by the end, it is doing you. Embodiment is the black belt test of an Integral Coach™—embodying our *growing up* capacities to take greater and greater perspectives and expanding our skills in being with ourselves and each other through this expanded knowing, and embodying our *waking up* capacities to be with the present moment, aware, mindful, and not separate from ourselves, each other, or source. From this place of full embodiment of the form, all previous expertise comes flooding into a container that is big enough to hold it all, yet porous enough to enable the all of who you are to pour through. All degrees and certificates and wisdoms find their way through the flow of this embodied form. It moves from being stiff and new, as any new form is when it is fresh and just being learned, to being flowing and free and full. This is what integral offers—it holds it all.

We have just finished training the first cohort of a specially selected group of integral experts, practitioners, elders, and exemplars associated with the Integral Institute. They studied with us from square one, wrestling with their own understanding and embodiment, letting go and letting come, and slowly relaxed into their journey. This was a unique and highly informed integral group selected by Laura and me to be part of this cohort. Below I have provided a small sample of their moving words to us about our Integral Coaching® method, and what they came to know and understand as they entered our classroom with a knowledge or expectation of what Integral Coaching® would be, only to have their perceptions altered, expanded, and cracked wide open into the space of fullness, freedom, deep love, and embodiment. Why do I share these? Because even those of us who *know about* integral may not have yet found a way to *know as* or live into the profound opportunity that integral application offers to us at this moment in time. The words from the extraordinary students in this particular cohort were offered to Laura and me prior to their “black belt tests” at the end of the Integral Coaching® *Embodiment & Certification Module*. Their expressions touched Laura and me deeply. With humility, I share a few excerpts from this gifted community of coaches as they described a bit of their journey with us:<sup>2</sup>

*Graduate #1*

I was given a hyper-drive ticket to a land of immense possibility. The emerging potential of what is possible via Integral Coaching® reflects the bountiful, seamless design of the method. I rest in my heart-filled truth when I say that I feel Integral Coaching® is the flagship for embodied integral evolution on this planet. I stand solid in saying that Integral Coaching® provides the most embodied, encapsulating means to integrate and bring to fruition the endless variations of Eros yearning to emerge. As a glue for development, Integral Coaching® provides the exact amount of tension and release. As a spark for transformation, Integral Coaching® can provide the heat of a tealight to that of an inferno. As an invitation to becoming, Integral Coaching® allows the Divine to arrive in every form possible.

*Graduate #2*

I see Integral Coaching® as a lineage that transmits the most advanced integral application in existence. (As Ken [Wilber] would say, not to be too grandiose, but...) I see this application as a technology of growth that is used to relieve suffering and catalyze development. I also see Integral Coaching® as a killer app that can leverage the work done through the Integral Institute and Integral Life to take integral to a wider audience and actually help people to embody the ideas that have been so inspiring to them.

*Graduate #3*

I always told people, “Coaching helps you get from where you are to where you want to be in your life.” That still holds true, but I implied right-hand quadrant results.

Now, I'm forced to reckon with the hard questions. Who am I in this moment? What grace can I find right *now*? How do I show up in this life to capture the fullness of being? "You're gonna die," she would say and we all laugh. It's true...but how quickly we pass over that—this precious little thing called life. I want to live for this impossible moment whose grandeur will never be captured. I want to be moved to tears by walking outside into the rain. I want to be willing to let my heart break 10,000 more times to find love. Integral Coaching® makes this possible. I need my cognitive maps, but I need them to go beyond them. I needed to know what all this map making was for. It was to set the human spirit free. Ken (Wilber) always said that, wrote that. You two finally showed me how to break out of jail. You are integral's grandmothers. You have birthed the future. You deserve so much. You have my undying support.

Integral's grandmothers? Okay, just to be clear, neither of us is old enough to be...oh, I guess, maybe we are. In offering our ICCP to a select group of highly skilled and accomplished integral practitioners, we could not ignore what we had developed because they repeatedly held mirrors up and forced us to clearly see what we had created. They continuously challenged us to take full responsibility for what our unique lives of practice had enabled us to understand and express. No small feat, their enabling of us to see ourselves in a way that we had not. We continue to adjust, learn, reflect, and modify. Always fine-tuning, always including more, as more emerges. We are fully aware that this life is as long as a cup of coffee and we are a blip on the horizon of human adventure. And we are grateful for the mirror that they refused to let us ignore, while also readily acknowledge that there is always more for us to know and embody in the integral landscape.

Laura and I entered this work with the intention to create a training system that was true to Ken Wilber's incredible work, that had an architecture as elegant and poetic as integral theory and praxis, that was good, true, and beautiful, and that enabled lasting development in all clients quickly and skillfully. And *all* of these actions were on behalf of one thing that rested in the foreground of our efforts: alleviating suffering in as many forms and through as many perspectives as Integral Coaching® possibly could. We wanted to develop a martial arts approach to learning a "transcend and include" horizontal and vertical development form, deep practice, form correction, more practice, more form correction, and embodiment. Practices addressed not only becoming an Integral Coach™, but becoming the kind of person who could embody and exemplify this complex work. This included working on self and shadow across all of the AQAL lenses.

Building the muscles of a coach is the same as building new muscles with a client. First you must understand the muscles that need to be developed, then you need to design practices, exercises, experiences, and assignments that step-by-step build the body, mind, heart, spirit, relations, and morals of an Integral Coach™. This includes drawing on quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types in all designs. Then you need to build a rigorous and loving practice container for their development, a place where coaches can try all their new moves, practice the form, and receive form correction; a place where they can be inspired through watching their teacher's ability to coach, and then having the teacher break down every step so that it is accessible; a place where they can meditate, taste gross, subtle, and causal states, awaken to their lives, with wider perceiving, and become *sangha* for and with each other.

As a teacher, this means consistently modeling the competencies that you are attempting to build in each coach. One of my friends at the Generative Leadership Group called this "ontological hygiene," referring to a hygienic way of being in the world where "do as I say" and "do as I do" are congruent. Am I walking the talk? Ontological hygiene invites me to pay attention to my own being in the world, taking my daily ontological shower, addressing my shadow issues, and being active in practice in my own life. I always liked how those

words sounded: *ontological hygiene*. Go ahead. Say it out loud. Try it out at a cocktail party: “Hey Bob, how’s your ontological hygiene these days?”

## Tai Chi Practice

There are many principles of tai chi used in our school, enough to fill a book on their own. Since early 1994, Laura has been a tai chi student of Lenzie Williams.<sup>3</sup> She first started studying with Lenzie when she lived in Berkeley, California. Since moving to Canada, she has had monthly lessons with him—with her wireless headset on—and has been able to work effectively, even in form correction, from a distance. She attends two to four advanced tai chi camps or workshops each year. During these times Laura engages in deep form work, practice in push hands (the martial aspect of tai chi), and receives private instruction that sets the direction and focus of her development for the ensuing months. It is a penetrating practice and fundamental to who she is and how she moves in the world.

### *Yin and Yang*

The principles of yin and yang are brought to bear in Laura’s way of being and in how our coaches’ ways of being are cultivated throughout our training program. The principles of yin soft receptivity (a quality called *insubstantial*—open, empty, and predisposed to receive) and yang direct action (a quality called *substantial*—open, full, and predisposed to express) are evident in our ways of receiving clients and our offers to them—a seamless flow of feminine and masculine, of listening and speaking. Cheng Man Ch’ing’s (1982) words capture the interplay of yin and yang. Although his words were spoken in reference to tai chi, the application to coaching, and indeed, our lives is far reaching:

Tai chi is the mother of yin and yang and is all embracing in its scope. The *I Ching* states that tai chi gives birth to the two aspects: yin and yang. When yin reaches its peak, it produces yang; when yang reaches its peak, it produces yin. The dynamic processes of hard and soft, movement and stasis, are all based on these peaks... The peak of yang is the extreme of hardness. The height of softness and stillness is the peak of yin. When the peak of yang encounters the peak of yin, the yang is invariably defeated. This is what Lao Tzu referred to as softness and weakness overcoming hardness and strength. (p. 7)

Both Laura and her teacher have similar demeanors—incredible softness with great strength. It is a palpable combination. Our students are deeply held by her and she wields her sword with skill and precision. No extra effort. Coaches in our school cultivate both yin and yang capacities, engaging in required Integral Life Practices such as different forms of study, meditation, and attending to the care and health of their bodies. They also develop deep compassion for their own developmental journeys—some of them stepping bravely up to their own unique lives actively and consciously for the first time. One young man, who has been a long-time student of integral theory, recently sent Laura this e-mail at about the halfway point in the *Embodiment & Certification Module*:

I have long known about my perfectionism and the critical voice that comes with it. But today I saw how it completes my Way as the Tree, how I neutralize experience in order to keep it dull and safe. More importantly, I felt it. I really allowed myself to feel it. And I felt genuine recognition. I felt, with Laura, a sense that I am unconditionally loved, that I am okay, that I am good. I really took in the compliments. Maybe for the first time in my life they actually snuck through a crack in the bark, and my heart



ached from being seen and seeing myself. I've been hit by wave after wave of very deep, very core emotion as the reverberations shake me. It is raw emotion; I don't even know what kind. There is grief, sadness, relief, joy all blended into something foreign, something for me, as if for the first time I have allowed myself to feel for me. Looking around me, this insight into my bark of criticism, perfection, and neutralized meaning has implications in every corner of my life.<sup>4</sup>

His yin receptivity to self is arising as he develops the ability to sit gently in the fullness of himself, yielding to his tremendous gifts, and holding with compassion the shadow elements that are also now in the light. And, the height of his yin softness naturally gives rise to yang strength, including his willingness to move into the world with more clarity, substantiality, and skillful means. As Lao Tzu noted, this is the natural working of yin and yang.

### *Flow, Postures, and Transition Moves*

Tai chi also has a distinct choreography and fundamental principles. By following both meticulously, the body-mind-heart develops in ways that would not normally occur if practitioners simply followed their own preferred habits—"Oh, I'll just do tai chi my way." There are truths and core principles that are not yet accessible to the students that are available to the teacher. Most people know the flow of tai chi from watching groups or individuals practicing in local parks or seeing it in movies. Those of us who have taken lessons probably learned "the flow" or sections of it, depending on the tai chi lineage that we had knowingly or unknowingly selected. Most of us, however, have not dropped deeply into the practice to advance to the stages of breaking down the flow to its "postures" and "transition moves." But if you were to break down each element of the graceful flow that we can all bring to mind, it is the unending and natural flow of transition moves and postures. To the untrained eye, it is just flow. Most of us do not know that in tai chi development, once you start becoming a serious practitioner, you will start to engage in classes that focus on posture work so that you can adjust—in minute detail—your body, and thereby the flow of energy.

I have seen Laura hold single leg postures for lengths of time that boggle my mind, as sweat drips off her body, then her little Timex watch beeps signaling the three minutes are complete, and she slowly transitions with great focus to the next posture, hits the Timex on her left wrist, and holds again. Legs and arms shaking, she holds this posture, adjusting internally, paying attention to core principles, taking their various perspectives, ever more delicately opening, opening, opening. Fine-tuning with unwavering attention. She gets to know the subtle capacities of holding postures, receptive to the energetic flow, strong in her stance and commitment to "staying with." Yin and yang.

Similarly, Integral Coaching Canada has a distinct method, developmental principles, and flow that are taught in some of the same ways as tai chi. The flow of a particular coaching conversation is practiced and practiced like the flow in tai chi is practiced and practiced. Postures and transition moves are learned. Form correction occurs. Bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits are adjusted meticulously, and through more dimensions than is done in tai chi as we include structure-stage knowledge in our fine-tuning. We enable coaches to see what they are seeing, the altitude through which they Look AT and Look AS the form or flow. There are greater and greater nuances available in our Integral Coaching® form at each progressive level of consciousness. A tai chi practitioner comprehends the flow through a different lens at an orange altitude than a turquoise altitude. Same form, same flow, same postures, same transitions. Different understanding and embodiment.

There is always a gap—in tai chi or coaching—between how the form should flow and the students' abilities

to carry it out while they are immersed in learning. There is no problem in the form being off as long as the student knows that there is a gap. This is important. I will say it again: the gap between the elegant form and what you are able to embody is never a problem; it is a “what is” and we can attend to it. The only problem is thinking that there is no gap, when the gap is evident to your teachers and other practitioners. Our students become very capable of working with “what is.” We, as teachers, also have absolutely no problem working with that known and acknowledged gap. Coaches are able to let themselves become very vulnerable right from the beginning of the training program because it is no big deal to be *working with* what is currently known and embodied.

This seems to be unusual in learning environments, given the number of student comments we have received over the years about the safety of our classroom. Indeed, many of us have become timid learners through harsh experience. It is crucial to provide a safe place to wobble, to grow from, and attend to what is, loosening the chokehold of the ego. For some, it is the only time in their lives that they have experienced a container that works with such deep acceptance, while at the *exact same time* practicing intently to lessen the acknowledged gaps in every aspect of the necessary embodiment. This is also a tai chi principle: being aware of the gap between the position you think your body is taking versus the one that is actually showing up! Mirrors help, teachers help, *sangha* (i.e., other students in the course) helps. You become more and more aware of the gap yourself and you attend, as fully as possible.

Our students learn to hold the postures of our coaching method. They learn to hold postures that allow them to become more awake to and stay with strong emotions, strong resistance, strong pulls to relax into old habits, strong desires to maintain their “old forms.” They learn to stay with great gentleness and great strength. Not only do students learn the postures of the coaching choreography, they gain access to what underlies the dance itself; they hold postures by stretching their minds’ capacities to understand complex perspectives in useful and skillful ways, holding each element separately and as part of a whole. They conduct assessments, constantly looking for new evidence of changing AQAL Constellations™, develop and write out integral practices to support their clients, and actively engage in their own practices as Integral Coaches™. All of these forms of “posture work” enable the coach to show up embodied, deeply aware, and fully engaged. They take their seat. They take a shape. And then they hold it until the time comes to transition to the next shape. In practicing posture work day in and day out, the “flow” or coaching choreography shows up in ever more elegant and unlimited expression. Did you think that the group of tai chi practitioners in the park ever held postures, sweating it out moment to moment, on behalf of increased intimacy and energetic access that looks so soft, so effortless, and so easy? They did. They do. And so do our coaches.

Laura and I were doing timed writing practices one day and I gave her this topic, “Outside of tai chi, tell me about a time that you ‘held a posture.’ Go. Ten minutes.” This is what she wrote:

Holding a posture is about keeping the body in a specific form and then cultivating the interior, while also encountering the challenges of muscular pain and emotions that may arise. It is a stance of integrity and it is a practice not only of technical accuracy, but of the way of being—the spirit of practice: Wu Wei.

The image that first comes to me was when Joanne went in the hospital and ended up having emergency surgery due to a large mass in her abdomen. In the middle of the night when I returned home after a very long and frightening experience waiting for her to come out of the operating room to see if she would be okay, I found myself both

relieved and devastated. For as I forecasted ahead in time, I saw that we were to teach the Certification Module in three weeks. It was late August. Our new school year was upon us. The idea of going it alone, when it truly takes two to run this program, was overwhelming.

And then something arose in me. It was like standing in a ward-off posture. I took a stance of, “I will find a way to make this work for everyone involved.” Over those three weeks I attended to every detail. I stayed in the fray of everything that needed to be done. I attended to Joanne with calm and tender care as she recovered in the hospital and then at home. I contacted highly skilled graduate coaches to help me out and through it all, I felt where I was tight and tried to relax and open. Holding my posture. Opening, opening, opening. I would breathe from my tantien and fully move through my days and my nights. Students, without consulting us, contacted our office manager Linda to find out our favorite foods and they delivered meals twice a week for six weeks. They held a new posture.

When it came time to teach the class, everything was ready and the five days were excellent. At the end of the fifth day, I stepped out of the posture feeling both exhilarated and physically exhausted. Like the end of five days of tai chi camp. I had held the form and worked with the arising conditions and experiences. And from it, something inside of me had grown stronger and fuller.

It is from this place of engaged practice that Laura contributes to Integral Coaching Canada. It breaks my heart open wide, slays me in ways that I cannot describe, as I connect to the deep integrity of her practice such that this posture was so cleanly held, so stably carried out, that I recuperated without ever knowing of its form. She was a calm, wise, and spacious center in the midst of a battle zone—just like how I imagine each of those tai chi practitioners must feel in the flow, in perfect unison with traffic on all sides of their tiny enclave of green grass. A composed, grounded, and present center in the middle of the messiness of life.

### *Push Hands and Adherence*

Another advanced practice in tai chi is called *push hands*. This is the martial part of the practice where you work in close proximity to another, holding your form, becoming softer and softer to receive, while perceiving any tightening in another and letting their energy push them out. It can seem paradoxical—you get softer and softer, developing your ability to receive, then yield, and in this receptivity, your opponents own energy can be neutralized, and responded to with very little force. Laura has said:

In push hands, you feel the person’s center in the push. You pick up direction and timing of where the opponent’s center goes. If they yield such that you can no longer feel their center, then let it go. If they shift right, you adjust. You follow by feeling into the other person through your own soft attention.

In our method, the coach is trying to feel into the client’s center, their way of seeing, going, and checking such that they have this coaching topic right now. It is from “feeling into” this center that an offer arises. To be clear, the term *feeling into* is not just about feelings, as it includes how the client perceives, thinks, sees, feels, understands, and makes sense of themselves, others, and the world. It is about feeling into a client’s center, not your own. No feeling into, no offer. In push hands, it is co-creative. Each partner is different, each partner has

a way, a certain style, and you need to adjust accordingly versus insisting on just one way of being in the push hands form. The same is true in our Integral Coaching® approach. As the coach, you need to adjust to meet the client wherever they are, while still bringing forward your flexible coaching offer.

So, through Laura’s tai chi practice and our understanding of the additional vertical elements, we have included in our school the principles of yin and yang, receptivity and softness, strength and action. We have attention to form and form correction that leads to elegant and seamless flow. We have posture holding and conscious attending that enables a coach to adjust at any given moment, holding the posture while opening, opening. We have push hands, feeling into, and adhering to clients at any level or altitude, with an ever-expanding and unique AQAL Constellation™ (yours and theirs), making whatever adjustments are necessary to meet them where they are again and again and again.

Laura’s contribution to this work brings tears to my eyes as I connect to the vastness of her wisdom, the gentleness of her way of being, and the strength of her clarity. This is embodied in her. I bow to her lineage of Cheng Man-ch’ing to Ben Lo to Lenzie Williams to Laura Divine. She teaches tai chi in this unbroken line and is additionally—and profoundly—informed by what Ken Wilber’s integral map brings to her practice. I am incredibly grateful to Laura on behalf of all the students who strive to bring the same level of integrity to this tai chi lineage and to our Integral Coaching® lineage.

## Writing Practice

I have been studying with Natalie Goldberg since 2003. She teaches writing practice through the window of her 30-year Zen practice, including studying directly with Dainin Katagiri Roshi until his death. She has brought her life on the *zafu* together with her life of pen and notebook. The practice forms are similar. Zen practice. Writing practice. I have done 10 one-week silent writing retreats (*sesshins*) with Natalie over the past five years, sitting (*zazen*), walking (*kinhin*), writing, eating, doing *samu* (work practice) in a *zendo* at Mabel Dodge Luhan House in New Mexico. I am a founding teacher in our Integral Coaching® school, but I am first a writer. I have written and kept a daily journal since I was 13-years-old. Studying with Natalie as my Zen and writing teacher has enabled me to bring my practice home, to taste the ground of being. Beyond the study of integral theory, my writing practice has served to influence my contribution to our coaching work more than any other source. What I have discovered in my writing practice has great similarities to what I have discovered in my Zen practice, or any other practice that supports waking up.

### *The Gap*

I sometimes wonder if most practices are about closing the “gap”—getting closer to essence in the myriad of forms that we choose, whether we sign up to become a certified coach or author or Zen practitioner. No separation between us and ourselves, between my thoughts and this present moment, between wandering, seeking mind and pure Presence, between time and the timeless now. I wonder if all longing—spiritual or otherwise—comes from this “gap.” I wrote the following reflective piece for the *Perspectives* section of our web site after another retreat in Taos, New Mexico. It touches on this longing, this gap:

Summer 2008 is a vague memory. We didn’t take time off so it feels as though I missed it. September has been a sunny blessing and I hear that August was rainy while I was away from Ottawa. I was in Berkeley and Sonoma and Walnut Creek and Taos and Emeryville. It was gorgeous, but I was tired and mostly working or sleeping lousy due to jet leg coming from one direction or another.

My brief time in Taos felt like summer. For five days, I was in stillness and sunshine assisting Natalie at another silent writing retreat. Blindingly bright days. Crisp, coyote howling nights. The magnificence of the vast New Mexico sky overwhelming my tiny body. I left the Integral Conference early and caught a before-dawn flight from Oakland to Albuquerque. As I drove from the Albuquerque Airport, bleary-eyed from a lack of sleep, I felt a deep quiet well up from the depths of my writer's soul. Cobalt sky, piñon dotted rolling red hills, mesas looming long and still. Tears welled to overflowing and a profound familiarity arose. Is it the land? The sky? This vastness? What is this familiarity that gently quiets my discursive mind?

I touch a well of longing. Human longing. Not just mine. The longing of all these writers wanting there to be no gap between them and their words, between their life and the page. The longings of writers are not so different from the longings expressed by twenty students who started our Integral Coaching® Certification Module last week. The coaching topics they brought forward curved around a common resonance:

*I want to more fully show up in my life.*

*I don't want any separation between me out in the world and me inside.*

*I want more intimacy in all aspects of my life.*

*I don't want to perform or have to be something anymore.*

*I want to stably live from this vast space.*

*I want to feel more peace, stillness in my life.*

*I want to be more emotionally available to others (and myself).*

*I don't want to lie on my death bed saying that I didn't live my "one wild and precious life."*

All of these topics bubbling up from the depths of human desire. This deep longing to be more closely connected to human fullness and freedom. To close the gap. Just like writing practice closes the gap.

This human longing for connection: no separation between you and this very moment, you and this single person, you and yourself when no one else is around, you and God or Buddha or Allah. Is that what I touch when I drive out of Albuquerque and head north on highway I-25 towards Taos?

Human longing.

It hangs in the air of New Mexico.

It drips off of each cottonwood and catches in the throats of crows.<sup>5</sup>

What is this gap and when is it closed? There are many answers from a spiritual perspective: nondual reality, touching the face of God, experiencing the ever-present Such-ness, the ground of being, Big Mind, Big Heart, being time. There are answers from a writing practice perspective: when I am out of the way, when the mind is flowing through the pen and I am not trying to turn it into something, cause something, be something, become something, other than what it is, in this very moment, with no separation. Lapses from this place of "no gap" produce writing that is contrived, boring, without a vital life force. You can hear it when the words are read aloud.

You can hear the gap in the early stages of writing practice. As a beginner, when you start to learn the basics of writing practice as a form, with structure and principles of engagement, you are doing writing. And with much writing practice under your belt, writing does you. It has taken years of study and practice to touch the place where wild mind writes through this unique self called Joanne. There have been moments when reading my words aloud have caught in my throat, my chest, my belly and, in so doing, have shown me again and again this space of no gap. I left a note for Natalie at one retreat, saying, “As writers, we practice to narrow the gap, get closer to looking at the truth of our lives, of life itself: with no gap, we are time.” “Yes!” Natalie exclaimed in her note back to me, “and we don’t exist separate and there is no time.”

What does this mean and why is it relevant? It is relevant because it is the ground from which I write, teach, and work with coaches. With writing practice, you write for years and years in a structure of sit, walk, write until you have let the ink of your life run clear. Writing practice is the same as sitting practice, in that regard. You show up, you pick up the pen, the notebook, you face the blank page, and you start writing. Topic: death. Go. Ten minutes. Topic: what it will take to write the truth? Go. Ten minutes. Get up. Walk slowly around your office, anchoring your mind in the bottom of your feet—walking meditation. Then take your seat again. Pick up your pen. Topic: the next muscle I most need to develop is... Go. Thirty minutes. Keep your hand moving. No daydreaming. Wake up! Writing practice meets Zen practice and takes no prisoners. It is kick-ass. It does not pay attention to whining. It is not for the faint of heart. It narrows the gap.

### *Stories or Perspectives?*

The first years, especially in memoir writing, include much moaning about life, childhood, the dad you wish you had had, all the same old stories, again and again, until even you are sick of the same old narrative. At that point, you drop into a whole other level of writing—simply being with what your life has been composed of and built from without embellishment. There are fewer adjectives, less single-mindedness, less attachment to only one story or identity. In my early writing practice years, this was one of my familiar story lines: “My father was a cruel, angry, selfish, drunken S.O.B.” This was expressed in an infinite number of variations over the years until the ink ran clear. But the later years of writing practice also came to include things like:

There was a time when I was little in his arms. He kissed my cheek once and stroked my newborn dark hair and pronounced me his ‘little black Jo.’ At some moment in time, in my infant consciousness, I must have felt his tenderness and his heart breaking open for his precious daughter. Safe from the car crash that precipitated an emergency C-section. He held his tiny, premature, first-born child in his hands. And at that one moment in time, he became mine. And I became his. All the way down.

Does it mean I had to let go of the former story? No. But that was never the whole story; it was the part of the story that was available to me then. And that part of the story was included and transcended through writing practice—waking up and growing up—over time. Staying with my practice, even when new perspectives disrupted my preferences. Covering all of the territory, not just the prevailing stories, all the way up, all the way down.

This is relevant for training coaches. As they get to know their own stories over time, they get to know their familiar refrains, illusions of permanence, and patterns of who they take themselves to be. Within months they are laughing at themselves, being playful with their own ways of being, seeing their stories through wider lenses—the dark shadows of the territory brought to light through the direct experience of being seen. The drama queen. The Lower-Right systems guy. I am no one. I am the center of the universe. So busy, so impor-

tant, I believe my own press releases, and we laugh and laugh at ourselves. Somehow, in this coaching work, we no longer take ourselves so seriously. This does not mean that we are not serious about our work. We are. It means that we have seen ourselves again and again and our “ink has run clear” as we hit the wider truths. It is from this place that our graduates move into the world to do this coaching work with other human beings. They, like writers, have seen their stories written again and again and again, until they too are tired of the same old refrain. It never meant that the story was not true. It was. It is. And it was partial.

Coaches meet clients from a deep place of equanimity, able to be with the story of this client, and with who they take themselves to be. Let me be clear: when I use the word *story*, I do not do so pejoratively. They are necessary for our development. Our stories expand in scope, depth, breadth, and complexity as we grow. Stories tend to live on the relative side of the street. Through ongoing practice, stories can also include aspects of “self” from the absolute realm. In fact, “developing a story that is informed by our true self, our timeless self is an important part of waking up” (Ken Wilber, personal communication, February 17, 2009). In my conversation with Ken on the topic of stories, he reminded me that, “The title of Katagiri Roshi’s first book was called, *Returning to Silence*—so, this is about getting rid of all the stories, nothing happening. Katagiri’s second book was called, *You Have to Say Something*—so, what’s your story? Only tell me a more interesting story: tell me a story about how mountains are no longer mountains and rivers are no longer rivers!” (Wilber, personal communication, February 17, 2009). We both laughed—our stories can radically change as we grow up and wake up!

We all carry these stories—ever evolving—about ourselves, our friends, families, and lives up until now. These are our meaning-making words and they are how we share who we take ourselves to be at any given moment. As a writer, I deeply respect the words that we speak or write. I will also say that once we connect to stories that go beyond the ones we have taken to be *truth*, we become liberated. And, from this place, of course, we develop new stories! You have to smile at that. We are story tellers. We tell compelling narratives. And as we grow, our stories reveal more and more perspectives, including Truths that we could never have imagined.

Stories can also change in a moment. It is all up for grabs! I know this through writing practice. I know this through Zen practice. I know this in our coaching school. Structure and practice contribute to this painful and freeing wisdom. It continues to inform me, and it continues to challenge me and my own practice. I am no different from our coaches. I wrestle with resistance to my own practices and partial stories in their ever-increasing subtler forms of freedom and torment:

Sit. Walk. Write. Sit. Walk. Write.  
Sit. Walk. Coach. Sit. Walk. Coach.

### *Writing, not Zen*

There are also vertical (structure-stage) perspective-taking capacities that you build in writing practice that are not built in horizontal (state-stage) meditative practices that cultivate greater awareness, presence, and waking up. Writing practice gives you the ongoing opportunity to take the perspectives of others, to represent or present the perspectives of others (especially evident in fiction writing), and to find language for different perspectives. The perspective-taking muscle is built and strengthened in daily writing practice, which is something that is not really focused on in meditation. You do not tend to sit down to meditate, butt on cushion, and say, “Today I am going to take the perspective of my father holding me when I was born.” Wilber commented:

Writing actually has a vertical transformative capacity when it is combined with presence and awareness. I think that is why Aurobindo said that he only did writing—that

writing was much more powerful than meditation because he was doing both. Writing allowed him to do vertical perspective practice as well as horizontal presence or state training. Zen aims for unmanifest emptiness. Writing does not aim for that. (personal communication, February 17, 2009)

Taking perspectives is something that is unique to using writing as a practice. As Laura and I brought our Integral Coaching® principles to form, writing was a critical practice that enabled us to articulate structure, course materials, worksheets, and resource articles. Constantly, we would place ourselves in the perspectives of our students to determine how to present complex work that would be accessible, powerful, and elegant. Consistently and accurately taking the perspectives of students who had never heard of integral theory and students who knew integral theory intimately enabled us to build the comprehensive system now in place.

### *Practice and Structure*

We introduce significant structure and practices in our Integral Coaching® work. And, of course, it is met with varying degrees of enthusiasm. There will always be those students who love the clear intensity of practice, the hardcore, crusty old Zen, full lotus posture, “bring it on” attitudes. These folks respond well to the martial arts nature of our work. And then there are those—the large majority—who experience all the forms of resistance and sleepiness that arise: I am too tired. This is too much. Why do I have to fill out these assessment sheets? I would rather just go with my intuition. We are calling students to be fully awake in their lives. Many of us—and let me tell you, I continue to be one of them—think, man, it would be so much easier to be sleeping. Can I do my meditation lying in bed before I go to sleep? Does that count? We long for more time for solitude, more time to reflect, more time to be in stillness with nothing to deliver, but when someone *requires* this of us, repeatedly, day to day, we moan about it. As though it is restricting us somehow, our freedom, our wants, our desires, our “I don’t feel like it. You can’t make me.” So we long for it, but when someone puts a structure on it, calls it a practice, and asks us to step forward, what arises? Resistance.

It reminds me of a Zen story Natalie shared with us two days into a particularly intense retreat. It was about placing a snake in a bamboo pole. The snake, as it moved in its curvy way, kept hitting the edge of the bamboo. It kept feeling itself, bumping up against itself repeatedly in each movement. It is necessary to have these edges, this structure, so that we too can bump up against ourselves. It is painful and frustrating as hell. Many of us have opinions, much previous training, and ways of being that we will bump up against. Much of the stuff that we have learned may need to be let go of as we move towards our longed-for futures. These ingrained ways of being have hardened, calcified, and the heat of the structure burns through it all. Zen structure is like that. On the outside, it may look rigid, but the structure actually gives you a chance to feel safety, to feel the hugeness of yourself inside the safety. There is tremendous wildness inside our human selves, but many of us have made ourselves smaller to get by. In structure, we can sink into and feel safe enough to allow the full energy to emerge. The pressure builds and we get to feel the force of ourselves flowing out. It is a vast force, concentrated, pressurized, and wild. Structure enables us to feel the full power of life living itself.

The structure allows us to become that which was beyond our wildest human imaginings. We are so much more. Structure. Form. Practice. Resistance. Practice. Form. Structure. In the bamboo pole of our Integral Coaching® work, we bump up against ourselves again and again. And it is all okay, all of it: the tears flowing down your face, pee your pants kind of laughter; the tears flowing down your face, dead weight crushing your lungs kind of sorrow. The bamboo pole is plenty strong enough. You are, too.

Being in practice closes the gap between the relative constructions of who I take myself to be and the absolute knowing of a much wider fullness and freedom. There is a profound knowing that in any given moment



both are available to me. That I have the responsibility to manifest this unique self into the world, to manifest Buddha-nature, God, spirit, source through me in all my current and new ways of being. That I will develop and, therefore, continue to find and work with new shadows. They go hand in hand.

I ask myself, how do I engage in a practice that has me become more awake to the light and dark? Awake to my own calcified parts? Awake to my own unique forms of resistance? The same way our students do. Sit. Walk. Write. Zen Practice. Writing Practice. Coaching Practice. Learning from and supporting my teacher in any way that I can, bowing to you, Natalie, and to Katagiri, your teacher. I bow to Ken, my integral teacher. I bow to our students, also my great teachers. And I endeavor to have my full self show up in the ongoing evolution of Integral Coaching Canada, a vow to alleviate suffering. As instructed, I start with my own: put my own oxygen mask on first, keep my pen moving on the page, butt on cushion, face the wall, enter the bamboo pole. Save all beings.

## Being With “What Is”

I am not sure how to express how the beauty and paradox of Zen principles are the foundation of our coaching work. Laura and I both came to Zen for similar reasons. It was a spiritual practice that would enable each of us to be in the direct experience of life. In sitting practice, we would face ourselves through structure, form, and discipline. From this place, we each found profound freedom, equanimity, and insight into the human condition. The practice itself cultivated our capacities to be with whatever arose, at any time, as best we could. This is what we brought to our coaching school, not only to support students through this process of becoming a coach, but to enable them to develop capacities to sit with their own and their client’s realities, or, as we call it, a client’s “what is.”

This capacity to sit with a client’s reality is built by students opening up to and being with the direct experience of the “what is” of their own lives. Our training program is designed to build these capacities, and as these muscles grow so do the levels of intensity, rawness, and freedom in which coaches can see and experience “what is.” Their cognitive, emotional, somatic, spiritual subtle bodies are able to sit with so much pain and joy. They can work with their energetic capacities in wider and ever-deepening levels of awareness and embodiment. And, as wider perspectives become available to them, they are more and more able to Look AS how another human being Looks AT the world. They are able to feel, think, and sense the “what is” of a client at orange altitude or green altitude. In this expanding fullness of perspective-taking there exists the possibility of meeting a client fully and with deep respect for their unique journey.

We ask a lot of our students. They, in turn, luxuriate in and wrestle with their development through their years of practice with us. We just finished teaching session two of the Certification Module last week, the halfway point in this program. Developmentally, each student walks through such different fire. Some of them entered the program feeling very sure of themselves, their expression, their careers, possessing a strong sense of success (substantial). Other students entered the training program feeling a little empty and open, with a less solid sense of self or form, wondering about a shape that could emerge for them (insubstantial). As we left the classroom on Saturday evening, the shifts were painfully and joyfully palpable. Many of those who had the world by the tail five months ago were deeply questioning, feeling somewhat lost, and less substantial. With less “self” substance, some felt empty for the first time in their lives and did not enjoy the experience, whereas others connected this emptiness to a liberated sense of no-self, positively radiant as the world poured through them—two different perspective-taking capacities and related ways of being with insubstantiality. On the flip side, some students had shifted in the other direction, feeling mightily substantial, like they had touched a sense of their unique self manifesting in the world, and were stepping up to the responsibility of living their full

lives, awake, alive, here. Substantial. Insubstantial. Both are elements of “what is.” The shifts we go through as we connect to the both/and of the relative and absolute. It can be unsettling.

Still more unnerving, at times, is that their teachers are okay with wherever each student finds himself at this point—or any other point—in his training. The key for us is that the students are *awake* to where they are versus asleep to where they are—state training provides this increasing capacity of awake-ness. As anyone who has designed and taught lengthy programs—especially after hundreds of students have walked through the doors—we too rest in the knowledge that things are unfolding with just the right amount of tension and release. We know the stability of the container, the structure, and the form. We too rest in it. Being awake to whether a student is disintegrating or integrating, and understanding the role and structure of a transcend and include developmental model is critical. Disintegrating and integrating are necessary, simultaneous, and impermanent. Resting in this place or being okay with where students are at any given moment does not mean that we do not actively intervene, challenge, or disrupt at the same time as we support and love them deeply. We do. Compassion requires the full spectrum of right action, and we do our best to be skillful.

Laura’s and my Zen practice enables us to continue to become more awake to what is arising. Our study of integral theory allows us to understand the technicolor picture. Waking up and growing up. Seeing the conditions and causes without become attached to any of them, as best we can. Watching, without thinking that this is all we are or all that is. And regardless of our flailing emotions as we grow and stretch and reach, we stay with our practice. Me here in this moment, typing to meet a deadline (that I am seriously resisting). You over there, doing what you are doing. And still, I sit myself down. Go. Two hours. Start typing. Yes, I can rationalize all I want about how I could work on this article later, when hopefully I will “feel like it.” Or I can sit my butt down on the chair, slide out the keyboard, and go. I calm my body and mind, as Katagiri Roshi (2007) says, and take my seat:

Zen Buddhism focuses on day-to-day life because no matter how long you try to understand life and death intellectually, you will never understand by using only your intellect – you cannot feel how deep your life is. Life is really vast, and you can never get a definite solution. I don’t mean you should ignore intellectual understanding. You can take care of your intellect by patting it on the head, calming your body and mind, and letting yourself go deeply into the human world that is beyond the intellectual world. This is our practice. (p. 219)

Fundamentally, Katagiri’s words capture what Laura and I longed to do: to “go deeply into the human world,” and our way was through coaching. Even as young teenagers, Laura coached swim teams and I coached soccer teams. Always working with the “what is” of people in development, always trying to bring new forms into being by breaking things down to discrete elements, understanding the muscles needed, and then putting the whole system back together anew. This is and has been our simple striving, our particular human striving. It calls on everything—our minds, hearts, bodies, and spirits. Sometimes, when we are really tired, we wonder what the hell we are doing. But then we find ourselves wrestling with and figuring out some new part of the Integral Coaching® map and eureka, we look at each other in astonishment and it all falls into place at another level of elegance. Or we find ourselves talking about a student and what they just realized, the liberation they just tasted, and we come back. Again and again, we come back. Like in sitting practice. I think that the mother of all practices is the practice of returning to your practice—repeatedly. We return to our students, our classroom, our coaching school, and all of our other practices that same way each time, the same way we all do. Nothing special.

## Investing In Loss

### *Tai Chi*

Laura has been attending a three-day tai chi advanced workshop in Berkeley with her beloved teacher, Lenzie Williams. Each evening she returns to our rented B&B with a tired body from a full day of standing meditation, flow, form correction, posture work, and push hands. Each evening we compare notes from our day, mine filled with writing practice, *kinhin* (slow walking practice), *zazen* (meditation practice), study, solitude, and some afternoon wandering; hers filled with body work, most of it done standing up, interactions with other practitioners, and a free lunch period. Each of us investing in our practices in so many different ways.

Lenzie often speaks about the principle of “investing in loss” as tai chi practitioners are about to begin engaging in push hands. There are many ways to be in the practice of push hands. On one end of the spectrum, one can be focused on winning (i.e., pushing your partner out before getting pushed out). This way of being in push hands calls for executing the moves already embodied, reliable, and resident in your body-mind. This way calls for getting the opponent out quickly before there is any chance of being pushed out. When people engage in push hands from this way of being, they have the same moves every time and beyond those well known choreographies, they feel vulnerable and unstable. Their arsenal is powerful, but small. In the short term, such a push hands practitioner can feel confident, superior even. And yet, the potential to expand and be open to the limitless possibilities available is capped and held firm to protect what is already here in order to “win.”

Cheng Man Ch’ing (1985) stated, “To learn tai chi ch’uan, it is first necessary to learn to invest in loss” (p. 22). What does investing in loss look like as a *way of being* in push hands? Lenzie describes it as leaving yourself open to being pushed out by your opponent, to see the degree to which you are able to yield and neutralize the push, to locate your own “edge” or limit. This way of being creates an opening for the practitioner to discover what is available beyond their identified edge—to relax the lower back, sink into the hip, suspend the spine. Ah, now the practitioner has expanded their capacities. It is called “investing in loss” because it calls for allowing your opponent to possibly push you out. It calls for openness, humility, curiosity, experimentation, and going past the known into the unknown. Over time, this way of being in practice builds capacities that will surpass the push hands practitioner who engages with a limited range of strong moves focused on winning.

When coaches take our training, we ask them to invest in loss. Experienced practitioners, especially those who come from related fields of human development, need to let go of old and familiar ways of being in coaching. The patterns are deep and it is easy to rely on historical muscles, safe and predictable ways of being. However, that does not open up pathways for wider experiences, ones that will in the long run create new muscles that are ever opening, ever expanding. Those of us who have been in coaching for many years are always looking for the next “developmental edge,” as Lenzie calls it—to not ever get settled in, even in the midst of a strong form. And, to keep coming back to the form with the beginner’s mind. What do I see now from this new vantage point, level, or new way of being? This is very difficult to do. Our culture does not celebrate investing in loss. So, there is much in us and around us that wants to push with all our old moves. In the short run, we may get the desired result. But in the long run, we are not cultivating the ability to expand our gross, subtle, and causal capacities. Forever.

### *Perspective-Taking*

The principle of “invest in loss” holds true in perspective-taking. Each day we have the opportunity to take more perspectives, see wider vistas, and understand greater territory. By investing in the loss of my old or current perspective, I gain the capacity to see third-person and fourth-person and fifth-person until I can see an infinite number of perspectives. Investing in loss contributes to this structure-stage development. “Fullness

tends to come from the vertical perspectives. How many perspectives can you inhabit? Are you going to be fully awake at red altitude with one perspective or fully awake at turquoise altitude and therefore inhabiting five? How will you interpret a moment of nondual reality, non-separation at amber altitude versus at green altitude?" (Wilber, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

In the integral community, as in many developmental cohorts, there is a focus on vertical development, but we can lose touch with the reasons for this striving. Why would we want to invest in loss in this way, repeatedly, over time? With each successive rung that we have climbed on the ladder of vertical development, we have had to let go of something. We have had to let go of a shared community of like-thinkers as we, often solitarily, venture out searching for another; we have had to let go of the sense of sureness or simplicity that we had in a previous level of consciousness; and we have had to repeatedly let go of thought patterns that, although narrower than the ones to which we were headed, were familiar and well-known. We have headed to places of greater complexity, views, and depth, and with this wider seeing came more choice-making, as we could not possibly act on everything we now perceived. It is a curse faced by integral leaders, I believe, for now, "I can now see so much more, but I only have the resources to act on half of it, so I continually have to let go of at least half of what I think could be done to be of benefit. I have to let go of the previous notions that all will be served. It is challenging to do, and weirdly easier too, and even harder to explain."

And so, integral takes a perfect lesson from the Tao, from the east, and we invest in loss—we lose our present perspective to take greater perspectives. We include and transcend from our current ways of being to our new ways of being. Letting go and becoming fuller, at the same time.

### *Writing*

In writing practice, "investing in loss" is also necessary. As writers, "winning" is often equated with published work, pages written, words counted, deadlines met, or number of writing days squeezed in between work commitments. This single-minded pursuit of words written as the only measure of writing success does not build the capacities that enable writers over time to draw from a wider source. Writers need to hold their "writing time" as something beyond just the number of written words—the winning score in writing push hands, me against the page! Writers also need to explore wider dimensions of a writing life. Much is sourced from the interior as a writer and yet, we do not often pay attention to nurturing and developing this interior space. Forcing myself to write all day does not replenish my body, mind, heart, and spirit. And yet, time away from the page or computer screen can be held as lost hours. But are they?

When I am perusing bookstores, hanging out with the lineage of writers instead of typing more words, I am investing in loss. When I am going for a long run, pages are not being written, and I can end up feeling unproductive. More loss. But something new opens in me when I get back to my computer or notebook. It is an active and awake investment as a writer to wander, to be loose, and to let things roll around. Not, of course, if that is all I do. I need to be in my writing practice, too, consistently working with the resistance of writing and editing and re-writing. But to be fully in my writing practice, it is important to be able to invest in loss and this does not include just lost hours of book-writing time, but also a lost sense of self, purpose, and location. Investing in the dreamer, investing in the unknown, investing in the loss of the productive, task-oriented seeker of my next completed writing project.

I am investing in a lithe mind. I am investing in a rested body. I am investing in the development of a wandering, acutely observant, and curious nature. I am getting intimate with my mind, my body, my behaviors, and my emotions in a way that is mostly unnerving to me because in my life, I have always called it "wasting time" or being unproductive. I have not held these times as an "investment"—they have been precious writing hours

lost. Strength training? Loss, if I am not writing my 6,000 words today. Reading a great book? More loss. One hour preparing a delicious, healthy meal? More loss.

### *Failure and Success*

Investing in loss is part of the practice field. Loss happens with every choice. When we train students, we also speak of investing in loss from the perspective of letting go of who we hold ourselves to be as though it is a fixed and defined identity. Yes, structure and form fight to maintain existence in their current state, so we need to invest in the loss of who we take ourselves to be. Invest in being vulnerable, in failing, in losing, in being the first to crack. In our culture, we lead with success stories. We speak about how we overcame hardship only *after* the healing was done. But if you were to find any of us in the heat of the fire, brought to our knees, in the midst of loss, you would find that which binds us to each other, that which cracks our hearts open, and leaves us exposed. Great failures, all of us. Happily. And, of course, great successes too. That is the koan, is it not? And as we reach for the fruits of horizontal and vertical development, we can be with each other in more ways, with greater degrees of understanding and awakened capacities, stand in the midst of loss and gain, failure and success, and get healthier together.

Natalie Goldberg wrote a book titled *The Great Failure* (2004), and she spoke to a group of us about how the book did not meet the culture where it was at the time of the book's publishing. The culture did not want to hear about failure. The possibility that loss is the foundation of all *true* winning is unheard of in our Western scientific-rational tradition where loss means losing—flat out. Readers did not want books about failure; they wanted books about overcoming failure. When Natalie wrote *Writing Down the Bones* (1986), it was a huge success because she said, "It met the culture where it was at that moment in time."<sup>6</sup> *Bones*, as it has been referred to, tapped into people looking for ways to capture in writing their wild lives, their individuality, their unique manifesting. The desire to record our individual expressions of unfolding drew people in and *Bones* sold over one million copies. But in 2004, the world wanted to hear about success, even though none of us succeed in everything. None of us. I have been brought to my knees and did not know if I would live to see another day. Laura, too. You, too. It is what binds us together, as does laughter and victory, of course. But at a cocktail party, what do we lead with when asked, "So, what's up with you these days?" I highly recommend responding with, "I have been thinking about all the times in my life when I've failed. You know, really failed." Things get real quickly. Be warned, people may move to the bar quickly! But some people will stay. Alleviating suffering sometimes includes a little suffering, right up front. That includes investing in loss on behalf of a wider, ever-expanding territory as a writer, a tai chi practitioner, a coach, a human.

## **Ignorance**

There is a word in Sanskrit, *avidya*, which loosely translates as ignorance. Rigden Shikpo (2007) offers words that provide a lens to understand form and a sense of self:

Avidya is not some vagueness that descends upon us. It is actually a volition that precedes any structured sense of self. With ignorance comes a sense of form. Form provides us with something to latch onto, something we can use to pull us up and away from the sense of non-existence. And from this arises the desire for experience: the desire to work in the world; to smell, taste, touch, move, and breathe; and the sense of an "I" that does all this. (p. 70)

Form gives rise to experiencing the world through smell and touch and taste and breath. We can lose our connection to the absolute as we engage through a relative knowing of "I." This is necessary in many ways, for

before there can be a “self” that can be let go of, there needs to be an awakening to the fact that we have created a “self” that we take to be “me.” We tend to be asleep to this reality as we go about our days, carrying out the plans and actions and dreams of this self. This self is “subject,” as we are blind to the notion that it exists. We are it.

Through Integral Coaching<sup>®</sup>, as is explored in other articles in this issue, we can learn about this sense of self. In essence, as we take subject and have it become object, we exclaim, “Oh, there I am!” We can see our self as object and we can look closely, with a magnifying glass. We can gain understanding into the causes and conditions that give rise to this particular self through the examination of our AQAL Constellation<sup>™</sup>: the unique combination of interdependent variables that give rise to a sense of “me.” We can start to understand our conditioning more and more. My Enneagram four-ness giving rise to my desire to be unique, with all the shadow and beauty inherent in that. My Upper-Left orienting quadrant sending me deeper into introspection, dreaming, and my own internal experience. And the remaining four AQAL lenses enable me to see a “self” and to hold myself as object. First, I need to see me. Then I can look for a more compassionate understanding of my unique nature dancing in the relative world.

The witness develops through this objective looking at who I take myself to be. Until at some point I see that if I can take myself to be this or that, how fixed is that sense of self? I start seeing that my mind can get attached to time and a solid sense of a “me” that arises. And it is from this sense of a solid “me” that I start building stories about why I am the way I am or providing explanations for why things go as they do—the great construction and illusion.

Laura and I often joke that we are going to offer a master’s degree in Integral Coaching<sup>®</sup>, the title of which will be: “You Do Not Arise From An AQAL Constellation<sup>™</sup>. You Do Not Exist. Everything That We Have Taught You Up Until Now Has Been An Illusion. There is no Current Way of Being. There is no New Way of Being.” The application process to get into this masters program will consist of one essay entitled, “How I know for sure that I do not exist...” Ken has often said that AQAL is a map of *samsara*, a map of illusion, a map of what is not there, and the map of the prison floor, but the better the map you have of the prison floor, the greater the chance you have of getting out of it.

Knowledge of our own AQAL Constellation<sup>™</sup> can become one of the keys to freedom and fullness. For I must first start seeing the conditions from which I think that I arise so that I can start building the witness capacities to see the illusions and gifts of the relative world. Then, I can start to see that my AQAL Constellation<sup>™</sup> is not a solid form that I can hang my hat on. It too is a constructed and changeable structure. It too enables me to escape from nondual reality as I solidly define my boundaries. But it is through knowing my AQAL Constellation<sup>™</sup> that I start building the ability to make the last move, the move from knowing the relative to the absolute, the move from ignorance to truth—the both/and nature of our human lives, the ground of being. As Katagiri (2007) wrote, “Full aliveness that exists at the pivot of nothingness before your conceptual thinking creates an imaginary world through human consciousness” (p. 77). From this place of seeing, there is no attachment to involvements and entanglements. There is no attachment to a particular current way or new way. There is only this moment. What interdependent conditions are giving rise to this moment?

I read a bumper sticker two weeks ago that stated, “You are always free to have a happy childhood.” I laughed out loud. I don’t think that slogan means looking back and declaring through rose-colored glasses that “it wasn’t so bad” or “it allowed me to become everything I am today” or “everything happens for a reason.” What I think that quote means is that this moment is arising here and now as a unique individual moment in its own right, *independent of other moments*. What is the frame of who I take myself to be *in this moment*? And given

that, how am I looking back on my childhood? Through which set of lenses am I viewing yesterday *today*? I am free, in any moment, to be with this looking back through a new pair of expanded glasses. Fresh. Not to make it better or, quite frankly, to make it anything at all. Just to look at it. It is the current “what is” of my way of Looking AS and Looking AT.

Try this when you are in the middle of being pissed off about something. You just got cut off on the Queensway by “an idiot” driving a black Porsche Cabriolet (the car you have always secretly wanted). She is traveling 30 kilometres an hour over the speed limit and you almost lost control of your new Prius veering to get out of the way. You slam the steering wheel with the palm of your right hand while muttering profanities, which is, of course, completely indicative of you not being integral *at all*, if anyone were to hear you! Try, right in that enraged moment to say, “I am completely free in this moment to not be totally pissed.” Try to do that, to really connect to how attached you are to that emotion arising, that particular sense of self called *justifiably pissed off*. May you be better at this practice than me! In the midst of strong emotions, we want to stay attached to angry or sad or joyful. We take that to be all of who we are in that moment. But is that true? Yes—and no. “I” am totally pissed off right now. And, at that same moment, I am also so much more.

The last thing we want to connect to in that moment is that we do not exist separate from time and space, that there is another way or view or perspective, that our fixed sense of self, *as most of us take it*, is also an illusion. The moment of being cut off on the Queensway is long gone, but I am still hanging out back there, even in this new moment. At any given time, I am free to be a whole new incarnation of me. But do I jump on that opportunity, ever-present, as I am fuming on the Queensway? Hell no! But then my cell phone rings and I have won the Lotto 649 and I completely forget about being angry. Anger gone, just like that! So, which me am I? And why is it all so transient?

Using the Integral Coaching® transcend and include approach to development, a coach going through our training can experience moments of greater and greater awakening—some profoundly and for the first time—in progressive stages of perceiving as follows:

1. I am who I am (subject) and I do not realize that there is any other way.
2. I am arising from my particular AQAL Constellation™’s current way (object).
3. I am developing into a newer, healthier, wider, fuller, freer me: new way (object).
4. This new way of seeing, going, and checking becomes “me” (subject).
5. Cycles repeat again and again and again until I come to see that this is the nature of ignorance (thinking there is only a fixed “me” in any of these cycles).
6. Deeper cycles of realization that different “me’s” are available at any time, all the time.
7. Touching the absolute knowing of non-separation, of no separate “I”-ness.
8. Freedom and fullness—playing in life with the illusion of “I” as a more stably lived way of being, which includes the fullness of taking many perspectives and a freedom from being attached to any one of them, substantial and insubstantial. Both.

As a cognitive understanding alone, this integral knowledge lives in the realm of theory. And that is fine and beautifully whole for cognitive debate, but as deep practice is added, enabling integrated and embodied knowing, ah, now you enter the realm of the “Jedi” Integral Coach™. You know who you are. Ignorance is not bliss. May the force be with you.

## The Great Matter

Great is the matter of birth and death  
 Life flows quickly by  
 Time waits for no one  
 Wake up! Wake up!  
 Do not waste this precious life  
 — *Buddha*

I often speak of death. In our classes, there is a running joke at the start of each new program to see how long it takes into the first day before I mention, “You’re going to die. Wake up! Don’t waste time.” I think my fastest record was on day one of the Certification Module this past September when I got into the topic of dying within seven minutes of the class starting. Our graduates claimed this as a record. I plan to beat it this May. It helps that my favorite color—and the vast majority of my wardrobe—is black. As I tell our students, I am always ready for a funeral. There are many kinds of death.

What does death and dying have to do with coaching? Only everything. Not just that you are going to die and therefore, wake up before your one and only life is over. And not just that your clients are also going to die, so “don’t waste time”—be of service and help to alleviate their suffering sooner rather than later. Death, by its very nature, is speaking directly to the living of a full and free life. Both sides of the same coin. Death. Life. I speak about death because I too want to awaken to the true nature of living fully.

At a recent writing retreat, Natalie Goldberg read a poem by César Vallejo. It was a poem about pain—the excruciating nature of aching and loss and suffering. It is a beautiful poem because it poignantly sits right in the middle of the agony. It does not try to alleviate the suffering or drown it out in a Guinness (or three). His poem just pulls up a chair and sits with the pain, in its vivid and bone-crushing anguish. It is Vallejo’s “what is” at that particular moment. He does not make it worse or better. There is no drama or sentimentality. He gets up close to it with a magnifying glass and looks. After reading the poem aloud, Natalie, with eyes flashing, slyly asked, “So, students... what do you think is the title of the poem?” “Death,” we answered, “Pain and Misery,” someone called out, “Living Through Agony,” another student offered. “Nope,” she responded to each proffered title, “This poem is called ‘I am going to talk about hope.’” We sat there stunned. What does hope have to do with agony? Only everything.

In this same way, death has everything to do with living an awake and happy life. We will die a million deaths in a lifetime. We will suffer loss of possessions, love, homes, work, livelihood, self-respect, friends, and lovers. And, we will give life to a million births. We will awaken, live with joy, fall in love, have children, see wider and fuller vistas, have ah-ha moments, and experience exhilaration. But when we look into each others’ eyes rimmed with tears in our mutual brokenness, we see each other. Somehow, I am not sure why, we see each other and all that is common between us. You will die. I will die. What shall we do between now and then?

My all-time favourite book is one I was given as a little girl, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* (Bach, 1970). In one part of the book, about midway through, Jonathan tells his best friend, Sully, that he (Jonathan) needs to leave heaven and go back to earth to work with the struggling gulls—just in case there are any lonely “gull outcasts” on earth, stretching the limits of what they understand to be possible in flight. Sully, saddened and heart aching, tells Jonathan that he is going to be so missed. And Jonathan replies, “Overcome space, and all we have left is Here. Overcome time, and all we have left is Now. And in the middle of Here and Now, don’t you think that we might see each other once or twice?” (Bach, 1970, p. 63). I wrote that quote next to my picture in high school



graduation yearbooks in 1980. It has come to mean more and more to me in the decades that have passed. In the exact moment of death, there is also birth. In the death of parents, there is birthed a parentless son or daughter. In the moment of a new child's birth, there no longer exists a pregnant mother. Such is dying and birthing as part of our lived experience.

In a coaching practice, you face yourself and your own birthing and dying every day. And you face the same process in your clients. In our school, you grow up and wake up more fully to your already perfect, unfolding life. And you will know more profoundly that you too will die. And in that knowing, all of our practices are joined together. One practice.

## **From Elke Drive to Borealis Crescent**

Laura and I did not meet at an integral event or coaching conference or even a lesbian bar! We met as neighbors in 1998. Laura moved into a house on Elke Drive, four doors down from where I was living. When I first walked into her home office after a long, cold Canadian winter, I was amazed to discover that we had almost identical little libraries. We both had Wilber's books, Zen Buddhism books, existential and philosophy books, corporate change management books, and in true green altitude fashion, many self-help books on various topics from yoga to mindfulness to discovering your true purpose. The black *zafu* and *zabuton* next to her desk were the same as mine. I looked at Laura in amazement as though I had discovered a twin from a parallel universe.

Laura had moved to Ottawa, Ontario from Walnut Creek, California and had just started her own coaching practice. I was working full-time for Nortel Networks managing a group of behavioral psychologists researching human communication desires, patterns, and technology requirements for the future. We were inventing little iPhone-like devices and researching them globally to determine the kinds of communication infrastructures that would be required in a decade or more. I was a researcher by degrees and trade, but I was most interested in developing my team wherever I went. I had been in corporate life for almost 15 years in various research capacities: market research with Dun & Bradstreet, medical/surgical research with Johnson & Johnson, and I was currently in communications research with Nortel Networks.

Laura had recently left a 15-year corporate career as a senior executive with Pacific Bell in California, where she too had led complex initiatives, developed comprehensive change management programs (the days of the Total Quality Management were fresh in both of our experiences), and directed large operations. Laura had brought coaching practices into her work and I was in the middle of doing the same at Nortel. We both had participated in many development programs, coaching courses from various organizations, deep human development inquiry, and our own practice lives.

During our separate corporate careers, although neither of us ever worked in human resource functions, we were most interested in what it took to develop people and what it took to actually grow and sustain new capabilities. Why did New Year's resolutions only last as long as willpower even with the best of intentions? We were both intrigued by the integral map in its various phases updated by Wilber over the years and had been trying to apply integral principles in our own searches for meaning and development.

We met in the front yard of my house. I was wearing red Adidas shorts and a white tank top and had just finished a 15-kilometer run. Laura was in gardening garb and had been digging in the dirt. We talked for hours standing there on my lawn. Coaching. Integral. Human development. Spiritual seeking. Each of us was already deep into Zen practice. Laura was a senior student at the White Wind Zen Monastery in Ottawa. I had a substantial, consistent sitting practice and had been studying Zen texts for many years. She joked that I should

leave Nortel so that we could start our own business. Six months later, we did. Over a decade later, here we are with Integral Coaching Canada. And, in the interim, we also fell in love and got married. Go figure.

During our corporate days, development was often pursued by sending someone on a course to develop a particular managerial skill or interpersonal capacity. The human resource development plan consisted of 1) attend a course and 2) apply what you learn. The course would finish on a Friday and the manager would be all keen and fired up to implement the new learning on Monday when back at the office. However, by Tuesday she would be overwhelmed with e-mails from having been gone for five days. By Wednesday, she would have applied one-tenth of what she learned the week before. By Thursday, she would be back to doing things how she had always done them, with a few moments here and there of remembering the process that she learned for giving feedback, i.e., “Say something complimentary, then deliver constructive feedback, and then say something supportive.” With no sense of how to change her current way of working, which had the most traction in her life, and with no ongoing support, the course was left behind as a wonderful developmental week, but long forgotten—a wistful memory of an inspiring five days with great trainers and keen participants. Great intentionality and little integration.

Laura and I agreed that the critical and incorrect assumption in this “send someone on a course” model was that the person had the capabilities to *implement* new learning, which is very different than the capabilities to *understand* new ways and means. Similarly, as we rise in consciousness, we can possess the capacity to understand wider and more complex perspectives, but our ability to enact and eventually embody them in our stressful lives is a different capability set. Wider integral perspectives can be brought forward (even in integral communities), but this alone is not sufficient if it does not also include what to do with this new perspective, how it impacts our current way of moving through the world, interacting with our sense of self, others, the environment, and spirit. Without embodiment, we can still deceive ourselves through, as Jiddu Krishnamurti stated, our “mask of ideas”:

Do not repeat after me words  
that you do not understand.  
Do not merely put on a mask  
of my ideas, for it will be an  
illusion and you will thereby  
deceive yourself.<sup>8</sup>

Wider perspective taking alone does not bring about change. Cognitive understanding alone does not equal embodiment. Laura and I had each been deeply questioning this development conundrum while trying different things out with our teams. We both had studied integral theory, and although we loved its elegant cognitive map, we were most interested in how it worked on the ground in application. There is a great difference between theoretical understanding and understanding that includes praxis, or the ability to live the theory. One thing that makes Ken Wilber’s work different from other theoretical work is his insistence that even *theoria* have a praxis component (i.e., even the parts of Ken’s writing that appear merely abstract carry a demand for embodiment). This is evident not just in Ken’s research and writing, but in his own practice life.

Laura’s and my way of coming at human development was through practice, which we would then try to understand, map, and break down into components through various theoretical and developmental frameworks. The circle was ever-present for us, linking what we were observing, seeing, learning in our practices, and in our work with clients and students, and then trying to understand more deeply, asking each other, “What is really going on here? How do you think they see such that they asked that question? What do they see and not

see? What would have been a more skilful and compassionate response?” We have spent our lives in interactions with human beings trying to understand the development structures shining through. Awake praxis supported well by comprehensive theoría.

Laura and I had both been through many training programs during and following our corporate careers. What we had experienced through other coaching schools, programs, courses, and workshops was that once the “taste” ended, so did most of the integration. That even with the best intentions and most profound of desires, the abilities for programs to enable sustained change were limited. We taught and/or learned from excellent strategic change, leadership, and coaching programs offered by a variety of companies. I had been drawn to the Generative Leadership Group (GLG) and their excellent work in designing systemic change. Mel Toomey was my first coach; he enabled me to see that I could play my guitar and write songs at 6:00 A.M.—and I hated him for that practice! It messed with my story that song-writing was a late night, glass of wine, candlelight sort of practice. I introduced GLG’s work to Laura and we are both still very supportive of the coherent systemic work that they do in the corporate marketplace. Laura had originally studied with New Ventures West (NVW) before moving to Ottawa. We taught their one-year coaching program once together before deciding to develop a fully sourced integral program rather than deliver one that is partially integral-informed. Although we remain grateful for our experience with NVW, it was actually through our relationship with them that we came to realize that the more fully we were going to dedicate ourselves to something, the greater was the need for that “something” to have clean, clear coherence, all the way down, not just in terms of being true to integral theory but also in being integrally coherent in all aspects of the business, program design, teacher capacities, and relationships with students. While their offering had solid coherence for them, it did not for us. I do not state this lightly. Objective research conducted by a third party came to the same conclusion as three self-claimed “integral” coaching schools (Integral Coaching Canada, New Ventures West, and Newfield) were subjected to the full scrutiny of Lisa Frost’s master’s thesis research (see “Integral Perspectives on Coaching,” pp. 93-120 in this issue). Her finding was that Integral Coaching Canada has developed the only coach training program being offered today that is fully and accurately sourced by integral theory in the foundation, fabric, and weave of our coaching method, process, and training program design. Lisa subsequently enrolled in our school. Through a separate assessment, the Integral Institute came to the same conclusion and our partnership was formed.

We wanted to build an integral adult development system grounded in integral theory and focused on alleviating suffering. Deciding to build an Integral Coaching® school had significant consequences for Laura and me. We took almost a year off—which was extremely difficult—closed our client business, contracts, completed in-process course offerings, and ate up much of our savings to sink deeply into root sources: integral theory, Zen, the Tao, tai chi, writing practice, subject-object theory, “U” theory, adult development models, change management theory, martial arts, systems theory, the work of Ken Wilber, Robert Kegan, Otto Scharmer, Jane Loevinger, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Carol Gilligan, Suzuki Roshi, Katagiri Roshi, Sri Aurobindo, Zenji Dōgen Kigen, Mary Oliver, Rainer Maria Rilke, William Carlos Williams, Jalal ad-Din Rumi, T. S. Eliot, and hundreds of other authors whose books line our library shelves. Body. Mind. Emotions. Spirit. We built a *zendo*, practice studio, and fitness room in the basement of our house on Borealis Crescent. And we settled down to a monastic 10 months of practice, deep inquiry, writing, articulating our experiences of working in human development over these decades, widening our perspectives and comprehending more of the integral territory, debating, drawing and redrawing, and we began giving voice to what we had come to understand. Our individual ways of being had always grounded each of our practices in a developmental context. Neither of us had ever stopped with just practice—we constantly wanted to know how our practices fit, and where, and why, and what else. These capacities served us well during this intense retreat period together. Our practice was deep and relentless. Formless became form. We called it Integral Coaching Canada. We wanted it to be good, true, and beautiful.

The materials would need to meet that high bar of excellence in quality, elegance, and integral design. The courses would need to match that in quality, elegance, and integral design. The practices to build coaches would need to match that in quality, elegance, and integral design.

Our school is not perfect. We are not perfect. We are flawed and messy and doing our very best. We confront shadow and face each other each day—it is not easy to be married and running an integral company even on our good days! We are still learning from every source, Ken Wilber’s latest thoughts, and integral’s ongoing evolution and global discourse. Our coach training program improves with each new offering as deeply realized integral practitioners join this lineage and add their voices. Thank you for your generosity and offerings to Laura and me. We are humbled by your trust.

When we started building our company, we wanted it to stay small. We had done “big things” in our corporate careers. Our school would live in Ottawa, Ontario. It would have just two of us and a small number of dedicated students—nimble, easy to adjust, fluid and flexible, flowing with demand and inspiration. Integral. No one needed to know about it. We could die happy and unknown. It would, hopefully, be of service to those who came into contact with it and that would be enough.

And here I am writing this memoir on behalf of both of us for the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*. Here we are, the global coaching partner of the Integral Institute and Integral Life, our program included as independent credit offerings in John F. Kennedy University’s master’s degree program in California, and we have been the primary trainer of internal coaches for the Canadian Government. Now we are expanding to other cities, other countries. We did not plan on this. We could not have known. And we did not get here alone. The wildness of life fills the bamboo pole and overflows into all time and space.

Laura and I bow to the lineage of pandits and gurus, teachers, and guides who brought their wisdom to bear through spoken word and written word to every aspect of our work. We deeply thank you, Ken, especially for the tears that welled in your eyes when we first met at your loft years ago, as you looked tenderly into our eyes—also brimming with tears—and softly said, “I’m sorry that you have been so alone in this integral work.” May you feel honored by our efforts to accurately translate and elegantly apply integral theory to Integral Coaching®.

We offer these writings to a wider audience knowing that we are only two out of many, many people doing extraordinary work in the world in ways that have much greater impact than ours. We look forward to what becomes of this shared vocation of consciousness development in the global community uniquely expressed by each of us, for all of us. May you be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

By your full devotion, the phenomenal world and unknown time and space come together and work together in your life—right here, right now. At that time you are calmly, stably walking on Buddha’s path, and you live freely in peace and harmony. The beauty of existence appears in your life as the functioning of wisdom, and your action is right because it is manifesting the truth. The human form called Buddha or bodhisattva arises as time and space, and that form really helps people. So let’s walk together with hope and make our life mature. Then, by compassionate action based on wisdom, we can help all sentient beings move one step toward the future. That’s pretty good for us.

– Katagiri Roshi<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> From Katagiri, *Each Moment is the Universe: Zen and the Way of Being Time* (2007), pp. 43-44.
- <sup>2</sup> These excerpts have been printed with permission.
- <sup>3</sup> Lenzie Williams' school, located in Berkeley, California, is called Tai Chi Berkeley.
- <sup>4</sup> This message has been reprinted with permission from the author.
- <sup>5</sup> See [www.integralcoachingcanada.com](http://www.integralcoachingcanada.com), Resources/Perspectives (September 17, 2008).
- <sup>6</sup> These comments were offered during a writing retreat with Natalie Goldberg in April, 2006.
- <sup>7</sup> "I Am Going To Talk About Hope" was written by Cesar Vallejo and translated by Robert Bly in the poetry collection, *Neruda & Vallejo: Selected Poems* (1971), p. 240.
- <sup>8</sup> Excerpted from a speech by Krishnamurti called "Formless Creation," given at the closing of "Camp K" in 1928.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 1, p. 172.

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