

A Moral Dimension to Parenting and Teaching An Introduction to Awakening Children to the Authentic Self and to an Evolutionary Context

An interview with Patrick Bryson¹

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Summary

In this interview with Patrick Bryson we continue to explore the question "What is Integral Education?" and this time from the perspective of what is implied by the possibility of awakening that which Andrew Cohen calls the authentic self in children, and thus a passion for ever-higher levels of human potential and growth.

So while postmodern educationalists struggle to accept any kind of developmental or evolutionary model that describes higher levels of positive human potential or how to awaken such potential in children, and parents are unaware of the deeper moral implications of their role as parents, we decided to talk with Patrick Bryson about his exciting, ground-breaking experiences in actually awakening children to this higher potential of what it means to be a human being.

To introduce this higher possibility, Patrick uses a simplified version of the schematic models of reality developed by philosopher and spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen. These schematic models of the human condition tend to provocatively confront our pluralistic, egalitarian and postmodern values and the "flatland" way of thinking which has difficulty in accepting a deeper vertical dimension, that there are higher levels of consciousness and human potential. As Bryson explains, after a particular experience with one fourteen-year-old, *"There is a lot of potential depth in children, more than we ever see, and it's more than we would expect. This experience really surprised and amazed me; it opened my eyes as to what was possible when we awaken the authentic self in children."*

Engaging in enlightened communication² is one way for us to actually experience this positive vertical potential for higher levels of human consciousness together with other people and Patrick Bryson is one of the first to pioneer using enlightened communication with children.

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² Enlightened communication is when interested and sincere individuals meet together to engage in an experiment that Andrew Cohen has called "the art of enlightened communication." These discussion groups were initiated by Andrew and his body of students in response to a growing recognition that when individuals come together with a shared interest in the evolution of consciousness, something new can come into being in the collective that far transcends the individuals involved.

1. Awakening children to the authentic self

ND: I understand that you have begun using enlightened communication with a group of children with exciting results. Could you please tell us about your experiences?

PB: The enlightened communication discussion groups that we are doing with adults are very new themselves and we are still finding out a lot. So you can imagine that doing these discussions with kids is even more novel. I started with a group of three children about six months ago. When I started I didn't have any idea what would happen or how to do it with children. Funnily enough though, as the public discussions have evolved so too have the one's with this group of children. I'm not quite sure what it all means yet, but the experiences we are having are definitely very exciting and significant.

ND: Could you describe how you started and some of the experiences that you have been having?

PB: These are children whose parents are students of Andrew Cohen. One of them is my daughter who is nine years old, then there is a boy who is eleven and another boy who is thirteen. We also have children visiting from other European countries. One of them is four and another is nine. Mostly I have been working with the three children who live in London and they are pretty similar in terms of their development. Generally speaking what I have found is that when we get together in this context of enlightened discussion, then their own development comes to life in a way that is very exciting. Their interest gets elevated quite remarkably and they become more interested, alive, responsive, and aware of each other and the relationships they have with each other in a way that is quite dramatic.

ND: How did you introduce them to the experience of being able to distinguish the authentic self?³

PB: I introduced them to the two models Andrew Cohen uses in his teachings, i.e. Heaven and Hell, which point to good and evil as a very fundamental way of looking at life, (www.andrewcohen.org/teachings/model.asp). So I used these models as a simplified reference point and context for the discussions. I started very simply and I found that they understood the principle of what the models convey virtually straight away, that there actually is good and evil and that there is right and wrong. Basically I have always used that as one of the fundamental backdrops for how we choose to speak about things.

ND: How did the discussions develop?

PB: When I first came with an idea of how I thought the discussions should be, even though I might have had so-called good intentions, it didn't have the results. The result is the most important thing. It sounds a bit nebulous, but I realised that it's really all about awakening and encouraging children's interests. That's really the key, and that demands that your own deeper engagement in what is happening has to be fully present in order to convey that and keep in touch with a kind of a current that's alive. It's very fascinating to keep it that simple, because

³ The Authentic Self is that part of ourselves that is already whole. It has never been hurt, wounded, traumatized, or victimized. It is already whole and complete, and yet it can and does develop. This is the part of ourselves that cares passionately about evolution for its own sake, already. When individuals awaken to the Authentic Self—even if it's only temporarily—suddenly they became aware of a living evolutionary context and experience a passion and concern about the necessity for development itself.

it means that it's actually quite demanding. But it has to be that way to be really authentic, and that's what the kids respond to.

2. Do you notice how alive you are?

Then an exciting thing happened about one month ago. I remember that we had been speaking for a short while when I pointed out to them, "Do you notice how alive you are? Do you notice how you are listening to each other, responding to each other and focusing on the one subject?" And when I pointed this out to them they really came to life, because they became aware of a kind of energetic quality that was between them, which hadn't been there before. And they now suddenly noticed how alive they really were. We then began to simply speak about this very immediate experience in a very experiential way, in the same way we do with these public meetings with adults where we keep it very simple and experiential. And I think that was the turning point for this group, when it really changed for them. For instance, my daughter, who is nine and who hadn't been saying a lot until then, suddenly started to express a lot of depth and understanding about being together and how important it was, and how the way she could see things had changed and was changing. This change in her was very explicit. She was very excited and I too was amazed at the understanding that came out of her, which showed me that there is a lot of potential depth in children, more than we ever see, and it's more than we would expect. This experience really surprised and amazed me; it opened my eyes as to what was possible when we awaken the authentic self in children.

ND: Could you describe more about the change you saw?

PB: Often when children are not interested or become bored, they physically slump over and start fidgeting, playing with things or looking out the window. They basically get distracted in themselves. But when I apply the ground rules of paying attention and listening to each other, following on from each other, they literally sit up, become more alive, very interested, and speak a lot more. They actually contribute a lot more, and express this depth I was referring to. So the change is actually quite surprising. They touch on a depth of knowledge that you wouldn't expect to see in young children. You see them expressing an authenticity that you wouldn't expect because of how we view children. You wouldn't normally expect them to change this much so quickly. And that's probably because we are not used to seeing such dynamic and positive vertical change in children and also because we know very little about the conditions necessary to facilitate and support vertical emergence.

ND: What you are saying is very important. How important is it that the child has mastered a certain level of self-discipline in order to sit still and listen? How significant is maturity or age?

PB: Actually I have found age not to be the kind of problem I initially anticipated. This might sound amazing but I actually had a situation where a four year old who couldn't speak English and follow the conversation was participating. Before joining she was having some problems with social interaction, for different reasons. But when she was in this environment it was like she was in the energetic field of these discussions. At one point she did something that was quite disruptive. So what I did was I got all the other children to explain to her what it was like for them to receive the disruption that she caused. And because she speaks another language somebody translated for her. Yet amazingly, within a few minutes, something in her woke up and she was very different. I think what happened was that she got a reflection of her self from the others that made her question herself on a very simple level, and this had a big effect on her. Ever since then, which was about six or eighth months ago, she has

progressively changed to become much more relational, happier, and more giving. So this experience inspired me to see what was possible and I think, generally speaking, that this is what happens with people who take part in these discussions. So that regardless of their age, they're able to get a reflection of themselves, who they really are, and this helps them to shift their perspective into something more positive and genuine. They become more forward thinking, more excited and more interested. I also think that what generally happens is that their interest is awakened, and that makes it very interesting to go with them in that and explore it.

3. Keeping it simple

ND: *What context did you begin using for the discussions?*

PB: I began talking to them about the Heaven model and linked it very directly to things they brought up in relation to things they were experiencing. Like for instance, the Heaven model is all about acting in a way that creates harmony and happiness and a better world. We talked about what was going on for them and just listened until I could pick up on something that indicated something deeper in what they were talking about and the way they were expressing themselves. In this way we follow a thread of what contributes to more harmony and more goodness, and more happiness. It's free-flowing mostly, but it is basically directed towards what is good and away from what is bad. My role is to constantly point this distinction out for them. And this then becomes the backdrop for what is going on. So from one week to the next, some aspects of that would re-emerge and I'd take them further, or maybe some new thing would come up. Maybe one of them was having some trouble at school or something; they might be being bullied, for instance, or experiencing a troubled relationship between friends. In this way we discuss things that are very real and important for them.

One of the boys seems to already have an impressive knowledge of what is in the teaching models, like the terms and the words, which is extraordinary in itself. But I always try and make it very simple so that we all go together, even though we are all at different ages and levels of intellectual understanding and have different experiences to draw from. But when you have one of them who is beginning to have an intellectual grasp of the concepts, it's quite remarkable to see them articulate this. For instance last week we began speaking about communion, because they had begun to experience this between them. It was a very exciting discussion because actually it was happening between us as we spoke about it, so they could relate to it very simply.

ND: *What words did they use to describe this experience they were having?*

PB: They called it having the "vibe" between them and they scale it between one and ten. So when we have finished a meeting they judge between one and ten as to how well it went. And usually they scale it quite high, like eight, nine or ten. So they know experientially what it feels like to be together in this way together, to be in this kind of collective dimension. And it seems quite simple now for that experience to be generated and to come about between them, because they are quite familiar with it now. They know what the rules are and they know that if they make an effort to be together and concentrate and listen to each other – and for children to do that is something in itself – then they know that this experience happens between them and they actually value it.

ND: *How often do they engage in these discussions and for how long?*

PB: For practical reasons, usually every two weeks. I've found that the maximum amount of time that they can sustain this level of communication is about one hour, usually forty minutes. It is very interesting because there comes a point when you know it is enough. It's like maintaining a heightened sense of awareness that they love, but they can only take it for so long. It's the same for adults. We can only handle it for about an hour and a half, sometimes two hours, but there comes a point when it is necessary to break off and sort of let it all in. So I find that generally it is between forty and forty-five minutes for children.

4. The moral dimension of free choice

ND: Could you describe a little more about how you present the two models that Andrew Cohen uses in his teachings?

PB: Often I speak about Heaven as being active, interested and awake, versus Hell as being inert, with a sense of being dull, not interested, sleepy or distracted. To help clarify this, they have actually come up with their own terms. They see the Heaven model as an escalator going upwards, a direction they have trust in and that makes them feel more connected with each other and more caring for each other. They see the ego model as a slide going downwards, into doing your own thing, and being separate, being rude or not caring for people. So their descriptions use very simple feelings and emotions and understanding. As you would imagine, this involves very basic differentiations between what is a good way to be and what is a bad way to be. And I have them then reflect about these two different sides to being human. Because you can tell they are experiencing it, but I want them to develop their ability to appreciate it and become more conscious of it and understand what it means within themselves, and what it means between them. And that's the bit that is very inspiring and interesting – they can and they do experience these distinctions, even though they themselves are often surprised that they're able to. It's much like us exploring collective consciousness, there doesn't seem to be anything out there, but you still find it very interesting to explore every time you engage.

ND: So are you discussing these two different flows, the escalator going up and the slide going down, as two processes that can be happening at the same time?

PB: Yes, there can be a tension between the two, that's correct. We had one meeting where we actually spoke about this evolutionary tension. And in effect this brings in the moral dimension of having to choose.

ND: How much have you been able to discuss this aspect of being able to choose?

PB: Quite a lot. At one point we spent several meetings going through the five tenets, so I basically would explain to them, in the simplest way that I could, what the tenets represented. And then they came up with their own translation of that (figure 1). And we have often used that as a reference point to go back and explore going more deeply into the way they understand it. And the one that is the most popular is the second tenet, which is all about choice, about not being victimised. That's the one that they seem to have the best grasp of, this importance of choice and the fact that they have a choice, and what it means to make a choice.

<i>The Five Fundamental Tenets</i>	<i>The Five Tenets as interpreted by children</i>
1. Clarity of Intention	1. I want to be happy (unselfish happy)
2. The Law of Volitionality	2. I can always choose
3. Face Everything and Avoid Nothing	3. I always tell the truth and I always listen
4. The Truth of Impersonality	4. We are all the same
5. For the Sake of the Whole	5. I always respect others

Figure 1. The Five Fundamental Tenets

ND: *Could you go through the version of the tenets that the children appreciate?*

PB: So the first tenet, **Clarity of Intention**, is wanting to be free, right now, more than anything else. They see that as being happy, as opposed to being sad or holding some sort of negativity. We then took that deeper and found that there are actually two kinds of happiness, selfish happiness and unselfish happiness.

ND: *Like a higher level of caring for other people?*

PB: Exactly, because you can be happy, just happy for yourself, and then they realised that being happy for others, not just for yourself is – well the Heaven version.

The second tenet, **The Law of Volitionality**, is about choice and they came to the realisation that they always have a choice, "I can always choose." And there is a lot to explore here as it brings in this moral dimension. It is also the tenet that we have come back to over and over again.

The third tenet, which is **Face Everything and Avoid Nothing**, they translated as meaning "I always tell the truth and I always listen." Thus not telling lies. There is a lot to this tenet as well, if kids really understand and follow it.

We haven't spoken about the fourth tenet, **The Truth of Impersonality**, all that much, but they call it, "We are all the same." This is quite a difficult tenet to understand for kids who are not yet teenagers. Even though it is implied in a lot of the things that say, we haven't actually gone into this one in any detail because I think it calls for a deeper understanding. This tenet is all about recognising that there is actually nothing personal.

The fifth tenet is **For the Sake of the Whole**. It's funny because when we revised the first tenet as being about unselfish happiness, they could link it directly to the fifth tenet which is caring about the whole, which for them means caring for others, looking after their things, and generally not just thinking about themselves. So for them this is saying "I always respect others." So they seem to understand this one quite well.

ND: *Does age affect their understanding in terms of the examples they give?*

PB: I think so, but not necessarily always. A lot depends on the way they have been brought up. If they have been brought up in this developmental context, of not being selfish and being supported in thinking about others, then this helps a lot. It's interesting because one of them, who is younger than the others, actually has a good understanding of these tenets even though generally speaking a lot of this understanding has to do with development. So I'm also finding out that there is another level to this that does not have to do with development, but which I think has more to do with the context that they have been brought up in or born into.

ND: *Do you mean the family and cultural environment, i.e. the Lower Left and Right quadrants, have to be supportive?*⁴

PB: Exactly. Someone who has been brought up with traditional BLUE⁵ values can actually embrace the moral dimension more easily than someone who has been brought up with postmodern GREEN values. A postmodern upbringing might be an advantage when it comes to listening to more alternative perspectives, but because it often struggles to understand verticality, distinguishing higher and lower, and therefore a context larger than itself, it has great difficulty embracing a larger moral dimension – being able to distinguish right from wrong – which in this case basically means that providing a healthy BLUE structure is vital to succeed in that particular stage of development. As soon as you get into this area of higher moral order, then kids who have emerged through impulsive egocentric RED to healthy BLUE get it much easier than the kids who have had a postmodern GREEN upbringing with no healthy BLUE. So basically, the level in the Spiral from which the parents are parenting from is going to greatly influence the relationship their children will have with the world. And so the postmodern Mean GREEN Meme, because it cannot see verticality, will tolerate and allow an egocentric relationship with the world, and basically let kids rot in RED and Hell. So either kids need to have parents who either can express a natural healthy BLUE or, even better, are now parenting from second tier and are able to selectively choose how they express themselves most appropriately as parents on each of the previous levels.

5. Experiencing the evolutionary context

ND: *Could you describe how you introduce children to the evolutionary context?*

PB: When I think back to when I started, it was obvious that I wanted to get into this territory with the kids – to convey and transmit some of what we were discovering ourselves as adults in these discussions. But this wasn't really happening while I kept trying to give them new ideas, no matter how important I felt these ideas to be. Nothing of significance happened so long as I wanted to convey to them something that they had to work out in their minds intellectually. But as I said before, the shift came when I got in touch with a genuine emotional engagement and focused on something that they could get in touch with experientially, because the evolutionary dimension is actually an experiential discovery. That's what it actually is in its simplest form. From there you can obviously extrapolate and fill it out with what it means and what the implications and details are, but fundamentally it is a living experiential discovery that we are actually living in an evolving universe *right now*. That's why following the guidelines was so important in helping to create that context. So it was very important for them to listen to each other, pay attention and follow on from whatever was said last. And even though these guidelines in themselves may not seem so profound, they actually create the understanding for awakening you to the evolutionary dimension. They make you break out of what Andrew Cohen calls the ego, which is basically non-development and non-evolutionary. So in this way the children have a direct experience of that which is real and purely positive – and that's really the evolutionary context.

ND: *How does this compare to talking about it intellectually?*

PB: You can talk about it, but a person's level of understanding will depend on their level of intellectual development. And I have found that to be the case with both adults and children.

⁴ Ken Wilber's four quadrants.

⁵ The fourth level value system in the model Spiral Dynamics.

So I think that it is always relevant that the evolutionary context is made experiential rather than just intellectual. We can expand on it intellectually once we are in touch with it, but fundamentally it depends on the same kind of engagement. At the same time, I found that the kids are much more fluid and flexible than adults, i.e. they get to experience this context very quickly. I'm not saying that they can hold it or fully understand the meaning of it, but in terms of their psychology they just get it right away. You see it in their faces and in their body language, which is generally much more open than adults.

ND: What words do they use to describe the experience?

PB: Positivity, interest, uplift, care, engagement, communication, and basically very simple reflections of the Heaven and Hell models. So we are using words that relate to the direct experiences that they are having in these discussions. When children are experiencing the evolutionary context it is very obvious, especially when in a group, because they are either all engaged, awake and interested or they're falling asleep, or distracted, or bored. It's very simple on that level, but it's also from that level that you know you have something very immediate to talk about and the implications of what it means. Then you can lead from there. If you are trying to just give them ideas, it doesn't have this immediacy or excitement as I described before. The only thing that kids really thrive on is what is *interesting*. So through their interest you are leading them to discovering deeper dimensions of what it means to be a human being. We do this by focusing their interest on discussing two fundamental relationships to life, which are: what would it be to live in the Heaven (authentic self) model? And what would it be to live in the Hell (ego) model? Because these are profound issues, the discussions really come to life and you can go deeper and deeper. And that's really what they get to understand more.

You realise that kids have all the interest that's needed, it's just that we are not really engaging in these profound questions with them. So when you do, and you are making it interesting, then of course they begin to understand, think about and awaken to these profound levels. So all that is missing is that they are not being engaged in these questions.

When kids reach the age of two or three, they start asking about these questions. But how many of us are actually there ready to listen to them? I remember hearing this before I was a parent and then I was really struck by the profundity of it. They actually have the questions. But they are not engaged in it and being listened to, so therefore they simply think, "Oh well, nobody's got the answer."

6. A responsibility to reflect on what it means to be alive

So this context changes our ideas about who kids are, their real potential. Part of the problem is that we have very fixed ideas about what children are, simply because of the way they normally act, which is largely a reflection of how *we* are. But their potential is as great as anybody's. It is the degree to which we are engaging with them which is important. That's why this burden falls most obviously on teachers and parents. And that is what we want to rise up to.

ND: So how does this compare to what we normally do?

PB: Well, normally we're either not interested or we think we already have the answers. That's why this experiential dimension is so important, because already having answers like God living in Heaven isn't a living a response to where they are. While in this evolutionary

context you want them to awaken to the immediate fact of being alive and discovering what that means. And that means you have to be focused on and interested in that yourself. So it's more like we are actually interested in transmitting what it means to be alive and what it means to be a human being. That's something that is quite mysterious, but it gets transmitted, and it's so striking when you engage with kids on this level. They absorb this authenticity and start waking up themselves. But for this to happen they need the reflection of that in themselves, so that they can awaken to it. And in doing so you also get into the area of what autonomy really means – for a child to be questioning for themselves – because usually they are not encouraged. We want children to become independent and to think and question for themselves, but do we know how to make that happen?

7. Experiencing the ground of being

ND: How do you talk about the ground of being⁶?

PB: I don't think that children have a deep experience of it. But sometimes when it is very alive between us I might just comment on the fact that it is very peaceful or there is a lot of trust, or a sense of calm and relaxation. So I point to that, and get them to look at that in themselves. When they start responding and have ideas about what we are speaking about, it's actually coming out of the ground of being, their own sense of excitement, interest, creativity and joy. So they reflect on the *ground of being* as being something immediate in them, and they are actually in it. Because usually we speak of the *ground of being* as something you discover in meditation, but they don't actually meditate or have that experience. So their understanding will be more obvious and deepen over time as they gain experience. But I get them to see that it is something that is in their experience already, even though they might not fully understand it. That it has to do with this creative dimension of being alive, for example, when they are very happy together in an unselfish way, then this is actually coming out of the ground of being, which is a sort of place where everything comes out of.

So my role is to shift their attention to the experience of being alive that they are already having the whole time when we are in this collective dimension. When they are very alive and they know that something is happening between them and they respect it, then you realise that the doors are opening up and you can help them to just look at it. And this is definitely something that has to be learnt and supported. So this is very different than talking about something that happening in the past, or might happen in the future.

One of the young guys has been doing some meditation, because his mother is doing it, and he does actually get more of the context about what meditation is. But I never press it on them or say they should meditate. I don't think that would be right. I'm not sure what age spiritual practice comes in, but it has much more to do with their interest and motivation in doing it. And I think that would be the time to encourage it.

The young boy who is eleven has an incredible grasp of the teaching models and I can engage with him, but I'm always checking to see whether his understanding is intellectual, and these are just terms that he is familiar with and that he can link to concepts, because it's much more important to go deeper into a real understanding of it. It's very exciting to talk to an eleven-year-old boy about the authentic self, and the soul.

⁶ The ground of being as referred to in Andrew Cohen's model is where there is no time, where the unmanifest, unborn Self abides in the consciousness of absolute zero, or no thing whatsoever.

ND: How does such a dialogue sound?

PB: One day we were speaking about evolutionary tension, and even natural hierarchy. The Five Tenets themselves are very profound, but the six principles of evolutionary enlightenment⁷ are what come out of a group of people living the tenets together. So he was speaking about evolutionary tension, which is basically this evolving positivity of wanting to go further and then he started to explain what he understood as being natural hierarchy. For adults this is a big thing, and yet here was an eleven year old who was curious and actually able to see, in this evolutionary context, that there are people who are at different levels with different experiences, and that this is what natural hierarchy is made up of. So he was starting to see natural hierarchies and responding to that. That means that he must be very interested in looking quite deeply at things. The context that we were creating together made it possible for the understanding that was in him to just come out.

8. Implications for bringing up children

ND: What do you see as being some of the implications of what we are talking about?

PB: I think that it must imply that if children are given the opportunity to enquire and reflect on these deeper levels in themselves, then they will become aware of them. I think it also points to the fact that these things are actually *in* them. There seems to be a deeper understanding and knowledge that is latent within them. This implies that when parents and teachers decide to bring their children and students up in this context, reflecting on these things, these kids will have a deeper and deeper understanding as they grow up of what it means to be an evolving human being. It can only have a beneficial effect.

But it also makes me aware of what they are presently missing, in their general education, because they are educated in a lot of ways and in lot of things, but I have noticed that their natural interest and potential to develop is not being freed up and the result is stagnation for themselves and the culture they are a part of. When their interest is freed up then they become more whole, more alive and more interested. And this obviously has big implications for our culture and society. In this sense, education is not just about being fed information, but it also points to the context for their development as being the most important thing. It adds a vertical dimension that is completely positive, but is presently being blocked.

ND: So with this potential open, they are no longer limited to being brought up within an unconscious horizontal context? Their parents and teachers are actually making the vertical context explicit.

PB: Exactly, we are actually focusing on becoming more conscious and what that means, rather than letting things happen as they happen and not being conscious of that and reducing it to a personal experience. This means that the moral dimension of life is brought in. There is obviously a lot to this topic, not least regarding parenting and teaching, that needs to be uncovered and explored. I feel that I am only really touching on the potential, but already I can see so much potential, just simply when I see what has happened to this group of children over the few months that I have been doing this.

9. Teenagers

⁷ In evolutionary enlightenment, there are six principles, which can be understood as three pairs: *purity of motive* and *integrity of action*, *autonomy* and *communion*, *evolutionary tension* and *natural hierarchy*.

ND: Are you aware of any other similar groups using enlightened communication with children or youth?

PB: Well, generally speaking, it's certainly the only group that I am aware of, because as I said the enlightened discussions in a public forum are still very new. There is a group of teenagers in America who live at the Andrew Cohen Centre in Foxhollow and they meet with Andrew Cohen and their parents in the same context. I met with them recently and was able to get to know them and explore the same things. I got engaged with them just to see what it would be like and I was really surprised because they are obviously at a different level of development than the group in London and it was very exciting to experience. It was much more thrilling and also very challenging to be with them. I discovered that what is needed is to be very free in your own thinking as much as possible and to go with them. Teenagers are much more mentally active. They are basically hungry for intellectual enquiry, stimulation, meaning and discovery. Their hunger for it is different from younger children. Not better, just different. I found that to go with them in this very free way and then to actually steer them from my own experience was very exciting and very thrilling. These two groups have a different quality to them. Because I think they have a different requirement too, which has to do with where they are at developmentally. In dealing with the teenagers, it became much more about helping them make ever finer moral and philosophical distinctions, and they were hungry for it and feeling very happy about that. Which shows that there are different requirements at different ages. But I approached it from the same context, with the same guidelines and ground rules. So while the ground rules and context were the same, the outcome and where we went was very different because they're at a different point. So it would be different again with a group of adults. With adults you can go into much finer distinctions and deeper questions.

10. Parental support

ND: How important are parents in support this interest?

PB: As I commented before about the Lower left quadrant, I can't imagine how it could work if the parents weren't interested or didn't support it, definitely with younger children or at least until teenage years. For instance, we have discovered that if a parent really gets this moral and evolutionary context and deepens their understanding, then the children somehow, almost instantaneously, get it as well, which is quite a shocking and interesting phenomenon to discover. Because that proves that parents and children are linked in a way that is very deep and can't be ignored. You often see the reflection of the parent in the child. It can be quite dramatic, particularly on one occasion, when the parent really changed and got in touch with a deeper recognition of the Heaven model. We saw the children transform completely. They transformed in their level of trust and confidence and interest in the very same thing themselves. So parents being interested in vertical change is a very important factor to vertical change happening in children.

I remember several weeks ago when I had been applying a little too much pressure and direction on my daughter. What happened was that she independently stood her ground with me, and didn't do what I thought would have been good or what I would have wanted or expected. It was a very big learning for me as well. The next time I was with the group, I approached it very differently, with much more humility. It was their interest that I should be encouraging and nothing else. I shouldn't be trying to force anything, even though I might think it's a good thing or a good idea, I shouldn't be forcing that on them. I should be more interested in what it takes to awaken their own interest in general. Since doing this it has

actually gone a lot more easily. My daughter has become much happier in herself. And even her understanding of what we were doing came out much more. It was the result I wanted but I didn't arrive at it in any linear, intellectual way or by forcing change. This points to something more creative, so you have to have a very creative approach here. For example, I met a fourteen-year-old teenager in Amsterdam and I could tell that her interest hadn't been encouraged, she was actually quite dull and seemingly uninterested but she really wanted to come to the meeting. Then it dawned on me that all I needed to do was simply encourage her interest. And as soon as I started probing in that direction, she lit up and just came to life. I could tell that she had been told so many things like, "You should be like this and you should be like that." It was as if she were hiding under a shell, and her interest wasn't being fully expressed or hadn't been encouraged. So when I touched on it and said, "This is what I'd like to do, this is what we are trying to do", she literally changed, she came to life and she was actually very relieved.

This approach involves meeting them on their own premises without preconditions. From there you recognise an obligation to guide them from your own experience. That's why I say you have to be in it with them and conscious of the vertical evolutionary dimension. Otherwise, we bring what we think they should be doing, but we are not actually including ourselves in that, particularly the moral dimension of things.

11. Moral implications for parenting and teaching

ND: What potential implications does this bring to being a parent or teacher?

PB: If we can give children a context that makes them more aware of the fact that they are developing and that they have free choice and what that means, then we give them a moral context, like signposts as to how to live. Not constricting rules, but guidelines, a moral fabric that actually gives room and freedom to explore and grow.

I was brought up as a catholic and there is a lot of moral framework there already, but it is also very inhibiting, restrictive and repressive and leaves you with a victimised approach to life. I then got involved in post-sixties things, where I explored a lot of freedom, but then of course that has its own pitfalls. For example, I was working with a group at one point which used a group process based on sixties philosophy where they gave each other a lot of room but there wasn't any moral framework, or guidelines as to how they should steer themselves when they had all that room. The result was a complete disaster.

I think it is only now that I have met Andrew Cohen and awoken to this evolutionary dimension that I'm able to place all these things in a bigger context where it all starts to fit into place, and I can understand things much more. As a parent, this is very beneficial because everything starts to fit into a bigger scheme in a way which is very satisfying, not only intellectually but also emotionally. I am able to care, and I don't mean in the usual sentimental way, I'm able to care for not only my daughter but also for other children as if they were my own, which I don't think I would be able to do if I didn't have this same context. You see how everything fits into an evolving and developmental model. There is a bigger context behind the details of everyday life. And it's not just some grand scheme, because all the details can actually be seen in the grand scheme as well, but in a very real down to earth way, not just some fancy theory.

You can actually appreciate how big a sense of responsibility this brings to being a parent or a teacher. Because if you do think about the future and care about the future, well you can see

that, without being glib, children *are* the future, so we have to fully take on this deeper responsibility and do so from within this evolutionary moral context.

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