

***Flow, Big Mind, Jazz, Poetry, and Me (27 pages, 6,250 words)***

A Caveat: I don't have credentials as a psychologist or a priest. When I speak about psychological topics (the conscious mind, the preconscious, and the subconscious) and Eastern topics (Big Mind, etc.) I speak only as a lay person, a reader, a writer, a thinker, a poet, and a human being. This essay is essentially a memoir. My intention here is to tell some of my own experiential truths. You can take it or leave it as you please. I'm writing this for the pleasure of doing it and not attached to the results.

The Unfinished House

I discovered that in planning for my house  
I'd neglected many fundamental features:  
not so inviting to live in a place  
with no carpets or cushions on the floors;  
not even window shades or drapes had I provided  
though there were huge, translucent beds and sofas.

I'd have given an arm for a hotplate then  
and some pots and pans and dishes  
instead of those powerful pieces of sculpture  
so full of agony and fervor  
but inappropriate for ordinary living.

It's taking me years and many reversals  
to move into my house on decently comfortable terms.  
Because of my earlier vast ignorance  
I've even had to tear down major parts of it.  
Why couldn't I have realized that a house of poetry  
needn't be a palace of pretentiousness,  
a garish castle built exclusively from glass?

My initial contact with multiple levels of meaning occurred when I was a very young

child. Marcia and Anne, the lesbian goddesses of my childhood, told me about the Dutch boy who saved Holland by putting his finger in the dike. As I grew older and got more experience I began to see other levels in stories they'd told me. Later many people were to remark that I had an *old soul*, a label I took as a compliment.

Starting at 11 or 12 years old I studied the clarinet with Chester Boles, my seventh-grade teacher who gave woodwind lessons on the side. He had me learning to play from written notation, then I continued on my own playing both the clarinet and alto saxophone by ear. I loved this because of the immediate feedback and spent many hours sounding out different melodies. The type of jazz then called be-bop exemplified by the playing of two genius musicians, Charlie Parker (Bird) and John Burke Gillespie (Dizzy) appealed to me greatly.

Since I played alto saxophone Bird became my idol. I loved his style which featured barrages of superfast notes in complex baroque patterns and tried to emulate him in my own playing. I soon found out that to do this I had to let myself go into a state of intense concentration. I began to integrate very fast passages into my improvisations. I had flights of fancy where I played faster than I could think, especially when we played blues in certain keys I had rehearsed. (I had practiced playing within the limits of blues chords more than any other types of music.)

When I abandoned thinking about what I was improvising, put myself into a concentrated *flow* state, I had whole palettes of colorful note combinations I could insert into songs.

Like Bird I could play richer and faster improvisations so long as I stuck to the proper chord sequence and returned to it when required. But I only seemed to have two speeds, very fast and very slow.

Hubris  
(To a Drummer)

Hercules,  
hold me off the ground.  
See if you can do it.  
Not that I'm Atlas,  
but I've too heavy a burden  
on my troubled sore feet.  
And I'd like to fly,  
soar like a helium bird!

Hercules, lift me,  
hold me up  
as long as you can.  
Don't say you don't understand,  
or aren't that strong.  
Sling me over your head, please!

That's the way!  
Whee! I'm flying!  
I'm Alice in Wonderland,  
Peter Pan,  
Captain Marvel,  
also Superman.  
I'm a crowd-pleaser  
and a hero too.  
I can accomplish anything  
except get down!

I finally realized I had limitations as a musician, among them not knowing how to read music very well, so I laid the instruments aside. I had been a college newspaper editor and writer for a small weekly and realized I probably had more of a future in writing than in making music. But I still had what jazz had taught me, a way to access my

subconscious with immediacy (actually the preconscious part where many combinations of notes were available).

For my last two years of undergraduate work I began studying in Berkeley at the University of California. There I saw a jazz/poetry reading advertised on campus and decided to attend mostly because I wanted to find out what type of jazz could accompany poems. It featured a Beat poet (Phillip Lamantia, I believe) and a jazz trio. I liked the jazz but found the poetry fascinating.

I decided to try writing that strange stuff. Writing poetry had certain advantages for me: it was quiet and wouldn't disturb my fraternity brothers' studying. And even more intriguing was the fact that when I let myself have flights of inspiration, instead of them vanishing in the moment as in jazz, I could preserve the best ones.

After studying poetry for a while, I attempted what some people have called "automatic writing", tapping into my subconscious by relinquishing conscious control and letting the pen run freely over the page. The focus I assumed for this was similar to what I'd done in jazz. The poet and Zen Buddhist Alan Ginsberg called this technique *First thought, Best thought* and used it to produce his works. He became successful because he'd prepared his mind for that over many years.

Although I wasn't hesitant to rewrite, I found I produced my best work by relinquishing ego control and going into a different, and in some ways higher state of mind. My

training in jazz improvisation had taught me to follow certain rules which I realized were similar to those for poetry: I had to maintain concentration until a natural stopping point occurred. When I lost this focus the poem would lose its stylistic unity. No matter how hard I tried, I often could not regain that vital element.

Contrary to what some poets had done, (even some famous ones) I pledged to myself that no matter how many levels of meaning there were, the first, or denotative level had to be coherent. For me each poem, even if layered with multiple meanings, should on its surface be an act of clear communication, not a self-indulgent exercise like many contemporary poets tended to produce. I called my approach to poetry *responsible writing*.

Most of my best poems were written when I produced perfect or near perfect first drafts. I won the University's poetry award after writing for only a year or so by using this method. I had to let go of my ego to tap the reservoir of meaning in the part of my mind available for immediate use. My major at Cal had been psychology, but I decided to enter grad school in creative writing at San Francisco State University, whose program was considered to be second only to The University of Iowa's.

#### On Poetry

Is it really me  
who thinks these words  
or am I a conduit  
for some higher power,  
a muse that's sometimes hell,  
sometimes death,  
sometimes playful spirits,

sometimes heaven?  
In fact my muse can be  
anything I've ever heard,  
seen, felt, thought or read.  
Great gods and little fishes!  
This world of poetry's  
not only wide;  
it's downright universal.

The major realization I had about poetry was that there were no limits to what can be contained providing I went by rules determined by each poem. Just like a jazz solo, each poem set up its own aesthetic which must be obeyed. Also I found that there were literally no limits to what I could draw upon, which is why I've called it *Big Mind* (for more explanation of this, see later in this essay). But there were dangers about being so open and aware.

#### Beauty and Truth

Beauty and truth,  
truth and beauty;  
do they ever coexist?  
Some say they coincide  
in only the greatest of us.  
But look at Jack London.  
His writing was beautiful  
and his life---well---  
he died young and alcoholic.  
And Hemingway? But Papa  
killed himself. And poets?  
Hart Crane jumped  
off the back of a ship.  
Sylvia Plath? Anne Sexton?  
John Berryman?  
They all took liberties with truth  
in their pursuit of beauty.  
I wish they were alive  
so they could tell me  
whether it was worth it.  
I believe the truth,

the sin qua non of life and death,  
can be quite ugly.  
Naked truth has beauty  
only from a vast perspective,  
more than most of us can manage,

For most people, their entire Big Mind isn't immediately or easily accessible, but I believe it can become so by being completely *in the now*, a phenomenon which happened to me when I hadn't planned what I was going to say. And I didn't realize what I'd said or written, (especially its lower, less obvious levels) until I thought about it later. To access Big Mind with any degree of success, we have to channel our subconscious elements the way I believe channeling that claims to be communicating with spirits or the dead is done.

In 1967 I attended a performance of *The Committee*, an improvisational theater group whose work impressed me greatly. Encouraged by what I'd seen from them, I joined the San Francisco theater group of Norman Sturgis, a TV and movie actor. He directed us in what he called *relate improvs* where one of us would start off with a subject or a role and others would join in. I did well at this, having experienced a similar flow as a musician and poet already.

Norman would give one person an assignment such as, *Be a young man who's just found out his girlfriend is pregnant.*

That person would start with something like this: "I'm a twenty-year-old guy and I'm worried. I found out my girl was going to have a baby. I don't know what to do."

Then Norman would turn to one of the woman and say, *You're his girlfriend. Relate to him.*

That person might say to the first: "I'm worried because you got me pregnant. What are we going to do?"

One by one, other people would join in as whatever role they chose---mother of girl, aunt, father of boyfriend, etc. This made for a very rich series of improvisations and tested each person's imagination.

Norman had us perform these exercises before an audience at **Intersection**, a large nightclub in the city, and also sing a cappella solos because he said the Moscow Art Theater required these from their students. The exercises were quite stressful for some of us, especially those who weren't singers.

At that time I'd also joined a therapy group. After being married a short while I'd noticed that my first wife, Toni, had some symptoms that worried me. I thought she ought to be treated by a therapist. A couple in our apartment house, Max and Evelyn Smith, recommended a psychiatrist, Dr. David Shupp, one of whose groups they were attending.



(New Paragraph)

Doctor Shupp had private groups which met at San Francisco General Hospital, including one for married couples. We started attending that, but before long Toni decided to drop out. I stayed and Dr. Shupp, who later became Director of Mental Health for the entire city of San Francisco, was so helpful that I used his services for sixteen years and called him my *second father*.

The Guide

*(In Memoriam--Dr. David Shupp)*

I hired a guide  
for a small but important trip.  
His credentials were in order  
but I thought him  
just another ordinary hack.  
At the time I didn't know  
he'd been to numerous worlds,  
knew them like he knew himself.

For sixteen years he led me  
to places I'd not dreamt of.  
When I'd begin to falter  
he'd urge me on.  
When I'd fall he'd say  
*Get up and start again!*

I wept when we finally parted,  
not so much for the loss of love  
but to celebrate the fact that now  
I could travel on my own.

I still see him every year.  
He sits in his chair and queries,  
*How's your world?*  
I answer, *Beautiful!* and as I speak  
I know that but for him  
I would have been like stone,  
never known true beauty.

After my wife and I separated, being in the care of Dr. Shupp, whom I trusted implicitly, gave me courage to experiment with several drugs some of my friends were taking. This was in the 60's when there was much drug use among musicians, poets, and even rather ordinary people. I'd heard that it might add to my creativity and thought that if there were dangers I'd have the good doctor to rely upon.

Dr. Shupp opined that my first dose of LSD probably sent me over the edge (although I'd had what people call *a good trip*) because two weeks after that I underwent a vivid death experience. I thought I'd burned up in one universe and now was in another parallel one.

That began a psychotic process which likely would have lasted until this day except it has been and is still controlled by medications.

The Natural Way's the Best

(To Timothy Leary)

One hit of acid;  
I was over the edge.  
It took no courage;  
only the conviction  
that something small  
as that wouldn't hurt.  
.Now I look back  
on it and think,  
*it was no big thing.*  
Yet It seemed  
to transport me  
to a world of gods,  
witches, ghosts, demons.  
I was a traveler for years  
to places I'd never imagined.  
What a trip for a poet---  
as if my universe had split  
and I had to choose between

the sun and moon.  
Heredity picked me for this.  
Fate was my companion.  
Timothy Leary,  
wouldn't you be proud?  
I survived and fashioned  
a soul for myself  
out of very tenuous materials.  
But what about the ones  
who kill themselves?  
And the ones eternally in hells  
of their own creation?  
I learned to make lemonade  
out of my own green fruit,  
but many spend low lives  
trying to make lemons  
out of lemonade.  
You can't guarantee  
they'll get the kind of help I had.  
Still, I've no quarrel with you,  
Brother Timothy: my case  
came out reasonably well.  
But I'm more than a little leery  
about your claims.  
And just for the record  
this was written while blitzed  
on January 1, 1990.

I was so out of control for one short period that the police came for me twice. I hid from them and they finally went away. Because of Shupp's excellent care, I escaped being in the formal mental health system, a fate I was quite afraid of since my mother had gone into Greystone Park, the New Jersey State Hospital for the Insane, when I was eight years old and never gotten out (She died there after 23 years).

Some Gratuitous Advice

(To Young Experimenters)

Take care of business, youngster.  
No matter that you've died.  
You're not the first

nor will you be the last.  
I can imagine what you're going through  
and it's appalling, yes, not fair  
that your spirit has to bear so much,  
but you simply can't ignore  
the demands of the ordinary.  
Get as much help as you can.  
Keep up appearances and be on time.  
If you want to be free to travel  
(and travel's not impossible in hell)  
then you don't want to arouse  
the fears of ordinary people.  
Confide in those you trust  
but don't get violent,  
scream that you're right  
or injure yourself (You hurt  
every one of us then!)  
Be circumspect and take care  
if you don't want them to come  
in blacks and whites and ambulances  
and spirit your spirit away.

When my psychosis happened the ordinary mental filters I'd developed seemed to stop working. I became overwhelmed by the contents of my subconscious. Dr. Shupp said I had *decompensated*. Originally I'd conceived of myself having a pinhole to my subconscious that I could access when playing music or writing, but now I had to endure words, symbols, images rushing through my mind like water through a fire hose. It was more than my weak ego could handle. In that symbolic world I began to believe almost anything I happened to think.

### The Split

I've one foot in hell  
and the other in heaven.  
Yes, my right hand's in hell too  
and my left's in heaven.  
Meanwhile my midbrain's  
running, running, running,

shouting, "*Choose, damn you, choose. Anything's better than this!*" but I don't for a moment want to humor it. I guess I'll rest here for a while, half-dark, half-light like some satellites I've seen and continue writing funny, saintly, crazy, tragic poetry.

This breakdown or *breakthrough* of the subconscious did give me a bird's eye view of its symbolic language. I suddenly saw hidden meanings in everything, even street signs, license plates, random statements and events. Until I integrated these with the help of anti-psychotic medications, I lived in the magical world of schizophrenia.

At the time I didn't think I was learning anything or getting more creative, but I really was gaining valuable insights about my mind, experiencing enough suffering to develop compassion for others, and preparing to be integrated on a new, higher level. I remember telling Dr. Shupp I was aware of the second and third levels of meaning in statements as well as the most obvious or denotative ones. Some people call this *reading minds*.

#### Madness I

Like with static on my radio,  
snow on my TV,  
reality comes through  
but very faint and scrambled.  
Let me see truth!  
Let me know the actual!  
No, that's a lie:  
all I ever wanted was illusion.  
Even little truths appall me  
in this world of ultimate pain.  
If they put up a statue

#### Madness II

The soul withers  
like a spent balloon.  
The spirit stays alive,  
but its messages  
are strangely muted.  
Static dominates;  
the real's drowned out  
by disbelief.  
Illusions and delusions  
multiply like rabbits  
from an infinite set of

and said, "*This is you*  
I'd say, *Perhaps.*  
*But it doesn't show my indecisiveness!*  
I'm in the inner space  
hell has in common with the world  
where everything is most ambiguous.  
For years now I've done nothing  
but exist, just exist.  
Of course, I've an excuse:  
*I'm crazy.* But imagine those  
who've no such excuse  
for their bare and mean existences!

dark magicians' hats.  
The storm in the mind  
brings frightening visions  
sleep and dreams increase.  
Even the body may ache  
from utter terror.  
Then there's a tiny bright,  
a hope amidst the fear,  
perhaps just curiosity.  
I tell myself  
to concentrate on that  
and keep it there.

I realized that there could be more multiple meanings conveyed in phrases, sentences, or even single words than I'd recognized before, (or recognized but ignored). There was the obvious surface denotative meaning which might have a pun or homonym or two, its connotations in all of its uses, and a symbolic meaning with its own connotations.

Once in the group when I said "*We took the Sausalito ferry*" I suddenly became aware that on one level I could be talking about Dr. Shupp, who was gay and lived in Sausalito and who was indeed conducting us on a watery journey (There were many tears shed in that group and water is a symbol of the subconscious). The doctor recognized my embarrassment about saying that and had me promise to use such loaded statements only for defense.

There were other times too, when I did what I thought was *speaking to people's subconscious* (as well as their conscious minds), but I often didn't remember them since they were not so emotionally loaded. I made a bargain with myself to follow the discipline of only using multiple meanings when there was an intelligible surface level

just as I'd done in poetry. I thought this type of speech was merely an interesting trick or *sleight of mind*.

One incident where multiple meanings protected me (or my ego) was when a P.E. teacher, a very large football coach, resented me letting my class mingle with his in front of the gym before the exit bell rang. That guy was known for gruffness and started shouting criticisms at me every day in front of my students, a very unprofessional way of handling the situation. Finally, without planning or knowing what I was going to say, I had had enough, and let him have it from the depths of my being. The kids thought I was dressing down a tough kid but the implicit symbolic message got through to that coach.

It went like this: "*Ralphie, use your imagination! What do you think would happen to you if you acted like this out on the street? I'm a teacher and non-violent, but if you continue to act and talk the way you've been doing, I won't be responsible for the consequences!*" The big coach was within hearing distance and flinched like he'd been *snake bitten* (In that coach's slang, *to Ralph* meant to vomit.) Every time he came out after that, he would stand out of my sight behind a convenient post.

This type of address (likely a product of Big Mind) isn't usually under my ego's conscious control. It includes second and third level symbolic meanings, but I often don't recognize them at the time I say them. Dr. Shupp told me statements conveying these types of double and triple messages are called *indirectas* in Spanish, but there's no English word

for them. He assured me that they are more psychologically potent than expressing meaning straight out.

Compliments given this way can be very potent also. To help pass the time in my classes I tried to emulate Shupp's habit of giving them so subtly the recipient wouldn't know they were intended. I might say, *That was a terrific sentence!* or some other appropriate phrase when a student said something not intended for me, but that I overheard. I spoke and looked at another student but the subliminal message was intended for the first student as well as the second. I believe it helped make me a good peer counseling teacher, and aided in other classes too. But I was still occasionally on the verge of craziness.

### Pills

Sometimes I still  
stray into it,  
that shifting zone  
where hell  
and the ordinary  
coexist. It fills me  
with sweet voices  
(ones that might  
have swayed Ulysses)  
and the promise  
of unbelievable magic.  
I notice subtle changes  
in the atmosphere:  
common words  
become ambiguous,  
cities more  
impermanent,  
fields irradiated  
with false light.  
I duly note these  
but don't allow them  
to distract me.



I go about  
my ordinary business:  
teaching, counseling,  
writing poetry.  
Then I reaffirm  
my connection  
with this world's  
difficult reality  
by taking  
two or three  
miraculous  
but anti-  
magic pills.

At Shupp's suggestion I enrolled in yoga. I also studied Tai Chi and meditation techniques and developed regular practice in those for a while. During the 16 years I was in his groups, Dr. Shupp himself evolved from an interpersonal method of group therapy to a modified gestalt approach, some of which used techniques similar to Eastern Big Mind methods. We did exercises such as speaking as if we were every person or item in dreams we were analyzing. The results of this often surprised us and added to our awareness of our mental processes' breadth and depth..

Part of a typical session of Shupp's gestalt therapy might go like this:

*Dr. Shupp: You say you dreamt of a large boat on a blue ocean with the sun so bright you couldn't stand it. Tell us what it's like to be that boat.*

Client: "I'm a big boat painted red. I'm a container ship. My job is to convey things across the Pacific Ocean. I carry much cargo. I'm very sturdy and well-built."

*Shupp: Now you are the Pacific Ocean. What do you have to say as the ocean?*

Client: "I'm a very wide body of water, full of fish. Anything buoyant enough can ride on my surface. Right now I'm carrying a boat full of treasure and interesting people. And many other boats too. There are airplanes flying over me and cables under my waters."

Then the client would go on to speak for every other significant item in the dream. This technique is almost identical to exercises aiming at making people aware of Big Mind used by some Buddhist teachers, or so I believe. If I'm not mistaken, a session with a guru or teacher might go as follows (after reading about Big Mind in books by Shunru Suzuki, others, and on Wikipedia):

*Master: Speak as your fear. What does your fear have to say?*

Student: "I'm \_\_\_\_\_'s fear. It's my job to keep her out of trouble. Sometimes I'm very useful but at other times I can handicap her. That's when I don't know the difference between what's destructive and what's neutral or beneficial. Or when I'm there all the time instead of only when needed."

For me or any of us, tapping Big Mind is like going from one small room (the conscious mind) to having access a whole town full of houses (the pre-conscious), or perhaps a whole planet (those plus all the subconscious). No wonder the human brain is considered by some scientists to be the most complex system in the universe. I believe every perception is recorded there, how deeply depending on its emotional content although

there are also processes in our minds involved with forgetting (See *The Brain That Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge, M.D. )

We all have our own Big Mind but most of us can't access it very well, with coordination between the sub-conscious, the pre-conscious, and the conscious. Another way of viewing this seems to come from new brain research (quoted in the book above) which states that as we age, the connections between the right and left hemispheres of our brains increase, thus I believe more wholeness or *holistic awareness* (my term) is attained..

Some tasks, such as verbal ones, usually done on one side begin to be done on both. This may increase a person's ability to create spontaneous lucid verbal connections. Perhaps these types of messages originate when the right and left hemispheres of people's brains work together to produce speech, writing, and music. This ability is probably displayed mostly by madmen, poets, and mystics, but some others seem to have it also.. I don't think I'm that special for being able to do it.

More than once I've met people who were *older* than I and apparently could speak on symbolic levels at will. I call this type of layered communication speaking *vertically* as opposed to speaking *horizontally*, or solely on one level. (Some people would call that shallowly). I've heard that one can tell a person's degree of evolution (or mental *age*) by the extent he or she can do this.

I do believe in the age part of it, as I'll explain, but not necessarily that a person who can do it is extremely evolved. They might only be crazy. To me a better measure of how evolved we are is in how much effort and attention we give to changing our society and world for the better.

### The Friend

I see in him  
where I was  
twenty years ago.  
I point it out  
very, very gently.  
He argues loudly  
and I don't pursue  
the point.  
A year or so later  
he says, "Look  
what I found out!"  
Then I see in him  
where I was  
fifteen years ago.  
He's magnificent  
in his defenses.  
And the next year  
he comes up  
with it himself.  
Then I see in him  
where I was  
ten years after that,  
but I don't  
let him know.  
By this time  
I've learned not  
to blurt out truths  
he isn't ready for.  
Perhaps he'll never  
grow as old  
as I've become,  
but I'm just glad  
those older  
than both of us

don't press their  
points beyond love.

The ability to tap into Big Mind successfully made me not only more verbally adept, but also wiser in significant ways. As has been said by philosophers and many others, it's desirable to know one's self and one's inner universe; it adds to our confidence and the complexity of our personalities, a goal that some psychologists think is the purpose of evolution. (See the book, **Flow** by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi) I believe participation in the arts leads to this type of self awareness, one reason they should be taught in schools.

Many poets use vertical speech in their poems. One example of a very famous poem that accesses subliminal levels of meaning to reinforce its surface statements is *The Road Not Taken*, by Robert Frost. I'm not familiar with everything written about it, but know much has been said about its central metaphor of roads, obviously meaning life-paths or styles, and how Frost chose the more uncommon road over the other more traveled one.

I believe not enough has been written of the lower levels (or *levers*) of meaning many poems contain although more than a few people are aware of them. I call them *levers* because when used correctly they magnify and reinforce the strength of metaphors and add to their total effectiveness just as levers enable us to move articles too heavy for our bare hands.

As part of my study of poetry I've realized that poets not only need to be aware of their individual symbolism, but also that of the culture within which they exist. Carl Jung, the

great classic psychiatrist of earlier times has written about *archetypal patterns* and how universal they are. They exist in all cultures and the better poets pay attention to these too.

As I understand it, even if we're not poets, our Big Minds grow as the sum of our experiences, both verbal and non-verbal increases. Although there are narrow limits to what anyone's consciousness can contain, as we age the mental connections between the different parts of our minds increase exponentially, especially if we consciously aid the process by meditation and other means.

Poets and others who write and speak can fill their conscious, preconscious, and subconscious minds with words, phrases and ideas they might want to use. We can influence this directly according to what information we contact through hearing, reading, seeing or any other way whether voluntary or not. As is said about computers, *If junk goes in, junk will come out.*

Some people think our Big Minds represent real selves as opposed to our limited *Ego Selves*. Mine is most available to me when I speak without planning what to say, when I transcend my *I* and am completely *in the now*, and (I suspect) when I'm speaking from my right hemisphere along with my left which usually processes verbal tasks.

Buddhists and others talk about *beginner's mind*, which I believe may be a precondition for delivering layered speech and writing.

I have had therapy sessions with many doctors, some who seemed more aware and helpful than others..There were ones who seemed to try (perhaps unconsciously) to discourage me from accomplishing anything worthwhile, including successful high school teaching, my main career. One said that if I were really schizophrenic nothing should be expected of me and I shouldn't expect anything of myself. This is in contrast to Dr. Shupp's advice that I could be successful at anything for which I was properly trained.

Centers

(To certain doctors)

You say we don't have centers;  
we're the genuine hollow men.  
But we've at least two  
pulling at us in opposite directions  
with great gravity  
like the sun and the moon.  
You who say we're broken slates  
defaced by insane graffiti,  
who say we've no special character,  
stay away! We don't want you  
or need you to take care of us.  
You with your grim incantations,  
hollow platitudes, invidious labeling;  
you're worse than a case of the plague!

I believe no matter how broken we are by life we have chances to succeed although these might be in areas we were not familiar with before our breaks. To put it metaphorically, every door that closes opens other doors. Ernest Hemingway wrote in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*, *The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.*

For me, Big Mind's multi-level statements usually occur when I feel in the depths of my being that I'm being picked on over a long period and there's no other practical way to respond. It's my soul itself that's speaking, shouting, ***STOP THE HARRASSMENT***, not a product of my ego, not an ***I*** but a ***we*** or even ***they***.

Each time it happens I'm in awe because I realize that words or phrases I've just uttered are more complex and meaningful on more levels than anything I could consciously plan. Although some people think this occurrence in speech of multiple levels is nothing more than a clever trick, it can be very persuasive. When used in extremely negative manners, it could almost be called *psychological karate*.

Whatever they're called, having these types of statements as a resource bolsters my confidence, makes me more likely to take risks that go along with accomplishing desirable goals. As I grow older, I believe increasingly in the slogan, ***Think Globally; Act Locally*** even though the phrase itself has become rather trite. Several times I've been successful in bringing about changes to organizations and other systems that were beneficial to the larger community, perhaps not all I could have done, but enough to give me great personal satisfaction.

One of my favorite authors, Sam Keen, the American philosopher, wrote that sometimes schizophrenics can be very influential in societies, bringing about necessary cultural changes and renewal. I've met people who I thought were like this: some who've been formally diagnosed as mentally ill and others who have not. Many of them seem to have



one thing in common: they're able to communicate in vertical symbolic terms. This is considered abnormal and a characteristic of mental illness by some authorities, but in these people I believe it's a mark of genius.

Years ago I decided not to let the possibility of going crazy again hamper me from trying to change the world for the better. The fact that some of my attempts fail isn't a big issue for me. So long as I believe I'm doing what's right, making my best effort is what matters. To not attempt to bring about positive changes in the world would mean I'd have to find a different answer to the question, **What are we living for?** .

#### Epiphany at Seacliff Beach

*where ignorant armies clash by night*  
—Matthew Arnold—

It's sunset and high clouds  
are puffs of pink against light blue  
while waves wash in and gently  
break upon the shores of Monterey Bay.  
It's a world of limitless potential,  
an infinity of vistas  
as the sun sinks into the crease  
where pastel sky meets water.  
Now as the whoosh of surf resounds  
far lights begin to shine around the bay,  
each a twinkling star-like point  
against the land's squat darkness.  
The spectacle's enough to comfort me,  
to make me momentarily forget  
the blinding bursts of bombs,  
the white-hot glaring fires of wars.  
All around this ample world,  
each individual with his/her tiny lights  
and his/her total of awakenings,  
some happening just now

as separate globes go bright.  
It's enough to cause me to have faith,  
to make me cry out loudly,  
***Love thy neighbor!***  
trusting that we'll win  
the crucial race to consciousness,  
the race against ourselves,  
the crazy, painful, brutal, tender,  
half-illuminated human race—

### The Flood

To be there when the breakthrough occurs,  
when the dam of consciousness bursts  
and admits all kinds of heretical life---  
could you endure it?  
Only a few survived the flood  
or so one scripture says.  
But next time, next time  
let's have a more insightful race,  
a more peaceful and enlightened age.  
And if there's fire that era  
won 't the water quench it?  
And if it's ice I'll bet  
the sun-warmed flood will melt it.  
There doesn't have to be an apocalypse,  
don't you see? Much better if it's gradual:  
one by one, two by two, three by three!

### Whenever

Whenever the ironies  
of the ordinary world  
press hard on me;  
when people seem too difficult;  
when I think  
I've never been a success  
and never will be,  
hell speaks to me  
in an encouraging tone.  
I remember my own suffering  
and think, *He hasn't been there,*  
*he and she and he.*  
*I was nicked to take these pains*

*and turn them into growth.*  
Not that it's the only way  
or I'm the only one;  
but I've traveled through worlds  
most will never see  
and that's a sort of privilege.  
I take my satisfaction  
like a long, slow drink  
and think, *I've been*  
*a remarkable traveler*  
*and I'm not finished yet.*

Previous Publications: *The Friend* has appeared in **The Mad Poets Review** and *Epiphany at Seacliff Beach* in the anthology **Coast Lines, Eight Santa Cruz Poets**