# FROM FEAR AND HOSTILITY TO AWAKENING and HOSPITALITY: LEARNING TO ENCOUNTER THE STRANGE WITH AN OPEN HEART

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## The strange are *us*

1. The strange is no stranger to us. It lies within the bosom of each of us. The strange is found in the heartbeat of every one of us: “. . .[we] are always already everywhere inhabited by the Other in the context of the fully real“ (Smith, 2006, p. xxiv). The strange is that which has been denied in us, and becomes the shadow material (Hollis, 2007), to use the Jungian terminology. If, for example, a young boy is strictly told not to cry when he is sad and hurting because--his father insists--he will grow up to be a ‘sissy’, the soft and the sensitive in him could become a stranger to him in his inner world, and also he may see others who are soft and sensitive to be sissies and despise them. Not understanding this psychological construction of the strange can have horrific consequences, as human history amply attests: seeing others as savage, subhuman, vermin, criminal, evil, and the like. Ryszard Kapuścińsk (2006), the great Polish writer whose lifetime travels to foreign cultures and meditations upon Otherness are well-known to us through his journalism, observes: “Conquer, colonise, master, make dependent – this reaction to Others recurs constantly throughout the history of the world” (p. 23). Our present paper focuses on understanding the psychological construction of the Other, and seeks ways to deconstruct this construction, not just theoretically but through practices of embodiment.
2. To say that something is ‘strange’ often implies that we are not comfortable with it, and that we find it unfathomable, disturbing, and even threatening. Encounters with the strange signal to us that there is an alternate reality outside our own experience, and this can be threatening to our sense of identity insofar as we equate our experience with reality. The certainty, objectivity, solidity of who we are and the world we live in is implicitly questioned and challenged by the presence of the strange, and in the interest of security, our reaction is to reject the strange, even suggesting that ‘theirs’ is not acceptable, legitimate, real, proper, right, normal, and so on.
3. To think, as many of us do unconsciously and habitually in everyday life, that the universe comes to us with a ready-made catalogue of what is ‘strange’ and what is ‘not strange’ is, again, to show little understanding of human psychology and how culture plays a defining and constructing role in the former. The strange is an end product of a long and complex learning process, in the sense of enculturation (Walker, 2005), wherein certain kinds and possibilities of experiences are not imagined, allowed or validated, are denied and discouraged, or at least not invited in in the individual, again consciously or unconsciously, systemically or idiosyncratically, and thus are not given the opportunity to take root and become part of the person’s self-identity.
4. Let us consider a parallel example from the realm of language acquisition to gain a clearer insight. To someone who only speaks English (or German, French, and so on), he or she could find tongues other than English sounding ‘strange’ to their ears. Recall the etymological origin of the word ‘barbarian’: to ancient Athenians’ likely xenophobic ears, languages spoken by non-Greek neighours sounded like little children’s unintelligible ‘babbling’. Foreign langauges sound like babbling to the unfamiliar ear. But consider the fact that a newborn baby, or even a baby in the womb, is ready to adopt and speak any of the hundreds of distinct languages known to humanity. During the process of coming to belong to a particular language group or groups, a child gradually loses his or her ability to be sensitive to and spontaneously adoptive of other languages. This is the process of one’s mother tongue becoming totally familiar (‘familiar’ is related to ‘family) and other tongues outside one’s family and tribe becoming increasingly unfamiliar and ‚strange’. We the authors of this paper propose that an analogous process takes place with respect to acquiring beliefs, values, tastes, predilections, and so on—in short, all that defines the self-identity of a person. This analogy also points to the difficulty of transforming such reactiveness to that which is Other.
5. Now let us take a closer look at the process that identifies ‘my world’ as mine and familiar and other worlds as increasingly and seamlessly ‘not-familiar’ and even ‘strange’. This is the process wherein one may gain familiarity with one mode of existence at the cost of making other modes ‘strange’. The process of gaining particular knowledge and competency can be—*but doesn’t necessarily have to be*--a process of losing other possibilities. This process may not be too visible or noticeable, as much of this happens in early childhood. This is the process of acculturation wherein humans move programmatically and unconsciously from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and then most often, to the strange. Phenomenologically speaking, the movement in consciousness from seeing something as unfamiliar to seeing this something as strange involves, we suggest, a move from neutral noticing to a concept-laden perception that is often coloured by invalidating or pejorative value judgments. As such, these judgments are socially learned. Again, we propose that ‘unfamiliar’ is not the same as ‘strange’, and as we shall see, the possibility of learning to encounter the strange ethically, with open-mindedness, curiosity, understanding, and compassion, lies in our being able to dis-identify the unfamiliar from the strange.
6. As an aside: some words in English that can be found in association with ‘strange’, as we are defining it here, include ‘weird’, ‘bizarre’, ‘disagreeable’, ‘suspicious,’ ‘disgusting’, ‘offensive,’ ‘threatening,’ and so on. It is these negative connotations of ‘strange’ that we are concerned with in our present work.
7. How did the xenophobic Athenians come to hear their neighbours’ languages as babbling and gibberish? They must not have heard them neutrally or just as ‘unfamiliar.’ They must have heard it as bizarre, disagreeable, or even offensive. This same phenomenon still occurs in our own streets, schools, and homes today, even in cities where multicultural population jostles with each other. We propose that going from the more neutral ‘unfamiliar’ to the abovementioned negative, derisive, and discriminatory responses associated with the ‘strange’ is a socially constructed and conditioning process marked by personal learning in an individual’s given sociocultural environment, and associated in an invisible way with the developmental process of infants, children, adolescents, and adults. All our learning is supported by and encoded in our bodies right to the level of our nervous systems. However, what we need to remember is that this process of learning the strange is *not a biological or cultural* *necessity*. The unfamiliar does not have to turn into the strange. Moreover, we suggest that we can deconstruct the strange in our nervous system, and return to the more neutral unfamiliar, however challenging and difficult the actual practice and process may be. To this end, it would be helpful to understand more closely what goes on in our consciousness and the supporting nervous system when we encounter the strange.

## UN/Nerving ourselves

Physiologically speaking, the sight and sound of the strange immediately (that is, in an unmediated way) puts one into an alert state that triggers human defense mechanism and moves us into the *fight-or-flight* response system(Lovallo, 2005). Our ancestors managed to save their lives from deadly animal and human attacks and to continue to reproduce in the face of life’s hazards, thanks to this defense mechanism. But with us, even in the absence of deadly animal attacks, the same defense mechanism continues to operate, as in our reaction to the strange. Our reaction to the strange is immediate and unmitigated. At the sight and sound of the strange, we are not given to the higher cognitive functions of reflecting and negotiating. We simply react: fight or flight, if we can, or if we cannot do either, we go into paralysis (Levine, 2010), also known as ‚freeze’. Here is an example of strange-making as experienced by one of us recently:

*I am walking downtown in my hometown. I see a man passed out on the street. I can smell his body odor. I feel disgust and fear. I catch myself in the act of strange-making. I remind myself, based on my experience of counselling hundreds of patients/clients, that this man undoubtedly started life in an environment that could not support him. I am mad at myself for feeling disgust and fear, and some tinges of that feeling persist even as I reflect on my own personal history of how I must have come to have such a reaction. The notion that he is not like me and that I am not like him persists in my consciousness, and ‚justifies‘ my desire to distance myself from him, and as far as possible.*

Reading this account, we might wonder: “What is the problem here? No harm is done to anybody by the reaction of disgust.” This way of thinking lacks perspicacity. It lacks an understanding of human intentionality that spans from perception to action. Bai (1996) states: “For perception, having configured what and how something is, sets the stage or lays down the track for certain possibilities of action to follow” (p. 2). With us, perceptions and actions are tied together: action follows perception. We act what we see. Therefore, a critically important part of moral education is transforming one’s perception (Murdock, 1970; Nussbaum, 1990). For both Iris Murdock and Martha Nussbaum, openness, sensitivity, responsiveness, attentiveness, and empathic imagination characterize moral perception. We may substantiate moral perception further and add, in view of today’s conflict-ridden and violent world, such moral objectives as justice-seeking, peace-making, harmony-producing, compassion-generating, and loving. This is not an exclusive or exhaustive list of moral qualifiers, and other qualifiers may be added.

Moral education programs fail to the extent that they rely on prescriptive approaches: telling people what to do and how to be, as if telling people clearly, and even forcefully, what to do and how to be will do the job of educating them. Simply put, if people do not have the *capacity* *to be* certain ways, they cannot act these certain ways in any genuine ways and to any substantial degree. Hence, the most important and critical part of moral education is building the learners’ *capacity to be* moral.

However, here is the complication that we see: If we are very lucky, we may be born into a family and culture that holds thoroughly pluralistic, cross-cultural, and/or transcultural views of humanity, and upholds associated moral values, such as fundamental respect for different others and universal compassion, and have an expansive capacity to handle the encounter with the unfamiliar. But this is not the norm in the current world. Most of us through cultural and familial influences have fallen prey to a conditioning that takes us from the unfamiliar to the strange almost immediately, and that automatically triggers the defense mechanism of fight, flight, or freeze (henceforth, 3-F, for short). Through such conditioning, we see the strange, smell the strange, and hear the strange, and we are psychologically and physiologically reacting to the strange. We find ourselves avoiding the strange, trying to run away from it, or psychically assaulting it with discriminatory thoughts and images (e.g., racial slurs) *as if* to show our power and mastery over the strange. In all these responses, what we are doing is reacting to our own constructed past images. The strange is not ‘out there’: it is tightly embedded in our inner world, and it was put ‘in there’ from and by our past sociocultural conditioning. For instance, as young children we may learn, and become normalized to, racial prejudice and hate from our family, neighbours, school peers, and society at large.

*I (Avraham Cohen) still recall watching a television documentary about racial prejudice years ago. A very cute blond white little girl from the southern United States was asked about black people. The child answered without pause, with a sweet smile, and clearly without malice: “They come from monkeys and they are less good than us.” Clearly, this was an obvious truth to her. She had always known this to be so, and clearly had no ground that would suggest that there was any problem with this idea. We learn to perceive the unfamiliar—that which is not one’s own—as strange, suspicious, untrustworthy, unsafe, and threatening, and in this case as just ‘how it is.’*

Alternatively, we may learn to entertain the civil thought that we should not be prejudiced or we should be respectful of otherness. And we may be able to make some small gesture of such civility and respectfulness. Thus we may put on a ‘thin veneer of civilization’, but this is as far as we may be able to go.

Once we are *normalized* to be suspicious of and/or fear the strange, it is difficult to override one’s nervous system that immediately reacts with anxiety and fear, and to go against one’s physiology that has been mobilized to execute the 3-F moves. There is rather little room for reasoning with one’s nervous system (Haidt, 2012). What this means for us in terms of thinking about new ways of encountering the strange, culturally or otherwise, is that we would need to take approaches and training that address and work with our nervous system, and our physiology in general. This is what is known in the field of psychotherapy as the „bottom-up processing“ approach (Levine, 2010, p. 45). The discursive and cognitive approaches to handle, or even deconstruct, the strange do not go far enough, and are insufficient by themselves. Our work of encountering the strange needs to go down to the level of infiltrating the nervous system and re-training the whole body and whole person. A human being, as understood, for instance, in the Buddhist (Macy, 1991) or Daoist philosophy (Cohen, 2012) is an integrated system of mind-body-heart-soul-spirit that is interpenetrated by the whole universe within and without. The physical body is, however, the container to this whole complex, and we are proposing that our work of unlearning and re-learning the encounter with the strange needs to happen in this container.

BUILDING THE ENERGETIC CONTAINER

Let us explore how we may attend to the body in ways that support us in encountering the strange. Here, human beings’ own evolutionary history comes to our aid. Evolutionarily, *Homo sapiens* have added a newer layer of adaptive mechanism to the older layer of the three F’s. This newer layer, called by Stephen Porges, Professor of psychiatry and progenitor of polyvagal theory, the ‘social engagement’ (Porges, 2003), enlarges the repertoire of human responses in the direction of social connection and intersubjective engagement. With this newer layer of adaptive response, human responses extend beyond the 3 F’s into the realm of intersubjective connections and communication. At the far end of these responses lies the phenomenon of empathy and associated moral emotions, such as compassion (being able to vicariously feel and share the suffering of another), empathic joy (being able to vicariously feel and share the happiness of another), and in general being concerned and solicitous about others’ wellbeing. These are our intersubjective capacities that enable human beings to live together in cooperation and collaboration, and thus are the crowning achievement of humanity. Better peace and more harmony in the world would critically depend on the present humanity’s being able to seriously cultivate these capacities for social engagement and connection.

Is extending the capacity for social engagement a matter of learning to talk to each other, to attune to each other’s states of consciousness, and to show support for each other? Certainly, within Porge’s theorizing, social engagement is mainly this kind of work, especially within the context of the caregiver, such as parents, relating to children. In our own context of attempting to deconstruct the strange, our position is that we need to go far more vigorously into working with the heavily conditioned nervous system of people who are ready to set off into 3-F reactions. That is, we need a system of training that enables a person to confront situations and people who are triggering one’s strange-making reactions. Such training is more than a matter of relaxing and observing body sensations, as one does in mindfulness practices of sitting meditation. While sitting meditations could build the foundation of mindfulness, the next step needs to be taken with mindfulness, namely, practising mindfulness in the context of encountering the strange that is triggering the 3-F reaction.

In our search for a system of training and education that is robust and vigorous enough to do the job, we have found the martial arts tradition, mainly developed in Asian cultures. Certain forms of martial arts training offer us some valuable ideas and practices in our endeavor to learn how to encounter the strange with dignity of self and other, integrity as a moral being, and seeking possibilities of mutual connection in the face of Otherness. In the rest of this paper, we shall explore some of these ideas and practices, drawing upon on our own training experiences in Aikido and Neigong. Currently all three authors of this paper are students of Neigong (‘neigong’ means ‘internal study’), studying with a Neigong master, Sifu Lou Crockett, in Vancouver, Canada. Our study is mainly focused on what is known as ‘internal martial art’ that aims at cultivating, not so much fighting skills as building up an energetic container by reconditioning the nervous system, strengthening fascia, improving blood circulation, developing muscle tone and strength, skeletal alignment and balance, and expanding breaths, and in general working with the relational field in ways that re-awaken sensitivity to the energetics in and between people and the natural world. Central to our practice is cultivating the core strength derived from body-mind awareness and ‘intrinsic power’, traditionally known as ‘ki’ (Reed, 1988) in Korean or Japanese or ‘qi’ (Fauliot, P., 2000: Liu, & Blank, 2011) in Chinese.

The ability to develop core strength in internal martial arts is crucial to developing the relaxed strength required to contain and transmit a tremendous amount of force and energy. It is our suggestion in this paper that the generation of this kind of force and energy in the person is most helpful for enabling a person to confront and change his or her ingrained 3-F reactivity. This system for cultivating intrinsic or internal power that moves without the need for muscular tension and resistance is rooted in Neigong practice, and differs from all other systems that train the core.

Brantjberg (2007) suggests that establishing containment involves developing at least three 'tools': *centering* or sensing the core; *grounding* or sensing a connection to the ground; and *boundaries* or sensing a difference between self and world (p. 231). *Centering* involves active capacity to initiate movement from the lower abdominal region, which roughly corresponds to the area around our centre of gravity. This area of centre, referred to as the *dantien* in Chinese and *hara* in Japanese, is considered to be a source of power in the martial traditions. The ability to move our entire being with centre, however, is not about a particular point in our body. Aikido master Richard Strozzi-Heckler (1997) notes: "If center is the place we operate from, then the entire living body is center" (p.79). Our body, like all beings, has a spatial and temporal dimension and a connection to earth. To center, from this perspective, "is to experience our body in a total way" (p. 79). Centre in these terms is a way of describing what is our core self or individuality--our unique centre in the universe. In psychological terms, it is key to healthy differentiation from others.

*Grounding* involves the sense of our weight upon the ground. One feels the weight of one’s arms on the desk, one’s buttock on the chair, and feet on the ground. For some people, Brantjberg (2007) notes, such an experience is difficult to connect because fear and anxiety arise from not trusting that we will actually be held by the ground; we lift ourselves away from the ground, can't stand still, or are reluctant to stand at all (p. 234). Grounding gives us the basic ability to stay connected to our centre under shifting circumstances. Grounding overrides the 3-F reactions. Our capacity to trust the ground we stand on is connected to early experiences of developing (or failing to develop) emotional trust with those around us when we're children. People who are ungrounded are often not able to fully experience their legs because at some point they "missed a sequence of development and lost an organic connection between their legs and the earth" (p. 87). Strozzi-Heckler (1997), commenting on his experience working with students and clients, explains:

It is not uncommon to find the emotional history of these people marked by a pattern of having been forced to find their ground and support long before they were ready. If they were the eldest child, stories are filled with incidents of being pushed prematurely into walking. If they were younger brothers or sisters, they had to try to keep up and match their older siblings (p. 87)

Fortunately, we can re-connect to the quality of grounding by surrendering the weight of our being to gravity. This does not mean collapsing, but *trusting* that we can be supported by the ground and that the energy we have in the moment is all we need to in order to maintain balance.

*Boundaries* are about our sense of personal space--what is 'me' and 'not-me' or 'us' and 'them'--and emerges initially in the course of healthy development through the differentiation between the child and the mother (Bernhard, Bentzen & Isaacs, 2004). In the body, we feel various sensations when our boundaries are respected or violated. For example, a strong "heartbeat, sweaty palms, held breath, an impulse to push with my arms, or similar sensations tell me that another person is too close to me at that moment, that my personal space is being pressured or invaded" (Mahler et al., 1975 p. 238 in Bernhardt et al. 2004, pg. 137). Our ability to protect our centre and claim our personal space is connected to the body impulses to say no, to move towards what we want, and to move away from what we don't want. These impulses engage our whole being, particularly musculature and movement, and help us reach for what we want, push away what we don't want, and so on. Depending on our development, our muscles and tissues are numbed, weakened, or hyper-responsive to these impulses, and some kind of training is vital to re-establishing a sense of healthy boundaries.

Neigong not only develops core resources of centering, grounding and boundaries, but also offers a way of extending the core sense of self beyond the body through, what we are calling, ‘extension/yielding’. Extension is the extending of the mind beyond the boundaries of body to include awareness of an event, environment or encounter with another person. Yielding occurs simultaneously with extension, and is the ability to be in contact with another while not allowing the energy or force of the other uprooting one's own core and grounding. Yielding, in this sense, is not a giving up of one's space, but a buoyant compression of the body that allows the energy from the other person to be mirrored back to them without the use of force or resistance. One image that our Neigong teacher uses is of a ball being pushed into water from above. The ball does not lose its roundness or collapse, but compresses with the water below it and transmits the force back up.

MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING FOR PEACE-MAKING

The contemporary, popular image of the martial artist is one who trains for physical combat and to deliver well placed, debilitating force to an opponent. The successful Ultimate Fighting Championships, which are no-holds barred and often bloody matches, portray the ultimate warrior as one who is menacing, violent, and unforgiving. Indeed, many martial arts were developed from need in various cultures to defend against invading enemies. In these life or death situations, lethal skills were at a premium. As most of us living in relatively peaceful countries do not need to worry too much about physical violence and the threat of an external attack, the 'warrior', the need for martial abilities has become outdated. But even if we have the need to protect ourselves from external threats, the usefulness of combat with empty hands, swords, and other non-explosive weaponry is outdated, too. Historically speaking, the advent of firearms neutralized the efficacy for martial arts skills for defense.

However, the martial arts training has continued to the present day, and part of the reason for this longevity has to do with the fact that the heart of this training is Zen practice. To give a thumbnail overview of how Zen and martial arts training came together historically: at a certain point in time the samurai warriors became interested in Zen. They realized that having a mind that was not caught up in anything, and was free to move with the present moment enhanced martial skills. As time went by, it became clear that Zen training involved practicing for death: seeing every moment as precious and as potentially the last. This was no nihilistic view: rather, it was a view that helped warriors to see that whatever was in them that hampered their ability to be whole and fully present was a problem in combat. So, ironically, the warriors were set on a path towards wholeness as human beings. This, of course, included, full feeling capacity that was integrated with the physical, intellectual, and spiritual life of the individual.

As H. E Davey (2007) points out, the purpose of working towards perfecting the art is to work towards perfecting the artist, and, of course, the process is interactive and ongoing. In contemporary times we have many practitioners of martial traditions whose purpose in training and practicing is clearly to perfect themselves, by which is meant becoming awake and whole, and is not to prepare themselves for actual life and death combat. Martial artists train for physical strength, balance, flexibility, mental determination, sensitivity, and concentration. In particular, martial artists as peacemakers train for the capacity to transform conflict, and not falling into the 3-F patterns is a prerequisite to such training. These people can sit in the fire of distressing situations, remain open and curious to unfolding events with an intention to understand and stay connected, and respond creatively out of a desire to include and work with everything the situation presents.

There is a story retold by Amy Mindell (1995) about an American Aikido martial arts expert who is on subway in Japan. He is sitting quietly when a man gets on who is clearly drunk and is behaving in a belligerent manner. The expert gets excited. He sees an opportunity to use his martial skills to put the drunken man in his place. But then he notices an old man sitting a little ways from the intoxicated man. The old man calls over to the drunken man, “Hey, what are you drinking?” The drunken man responds, “I’m drinking wine.” The old man gets up, walks over to the drunken fellow and says, “Oh, I love wine. I drink it with my wife.” The drunken man suddenly starts to cry as he is lonely and lays his head down on the old man’s lap. The Aikido expert realizes that he still has much to learn.

Contemporary Aikido (which translates as “the Way of unifying with life energy”) master Wendy Palmer says that the attacker and the lover are not “out there”, but are within (Palmer, 1994, pg. 6). There is an internal world that is different from the physical, objective reality we move in. As the old man in the story showed the expert, it is how we attend to this internal world that represents the difference between perceiving the strange as a threat, thus making them our Other and enemy, and seeing the underlying pain causing the suffering and being willing in the face of our own fears to shift our intention towards attending to the root of the conflict. This internal world is our multi-dimensional experience, which includes bodily awareness, self-identity, beliefs, desires and fears, thoughts and intentions, and conditioned reactions, all of which are shaped by our relationship to others and our immediate reality. We are consciously aware of some aspects, and others are aspects as unconscious or what we perceive to be part of others (but not ourselves).

Martial arts, particularly those rooted in philosophies and practices for skillfully moving with and being moved by all of life's transitions experiences, have tremendous potential for teaching us how to develop integrity, compassion, co-operation, and ethical action in the face of difficult circumstances that confront us and trigger us into the 3-F actions. These ethical qualities are important for educators who seek to address conflicts and challenges within themselves and with the students and peers they work with. The primary goal of the martial artist is to achieve mind-body-heart-spirit unity, not to defeat the enemy, but to join with them so that the heart may be transformed (Ueshiba, 1988). The heart is understood here as the "receptacle of our experience" (Denton, 1998, pg. 54), the place where we meet the Other, the Stranger. An open and awake heart can receive knowledge into our being and meet the strange with power capable of transforming us and yielding wisdom (Kornfield, 1993).

FACING THE STRANGE AND BECOMING ENLIGHTENED

A story is told of a famous sword master, Miyamoto Mushasi (Tokitsu, 2005):

A short time after Mushashi’s arrival in Higo, Shioda requested Musashi to fight him. Shioda’s weapon was a staff 2.6 meters long, whereas Musashi chose a small sword of wood. Each time Shioda tried to penetrate and attack, Musashi prevented him from starting his movement. Thus Shioda was defeated. Musashi said: „This time, we are going to fight attempting immobilization in the jujutsu style. I will sit down here without a sword. If you succeed in getting within a distance of one *ken* (1.8 meters) of me, i will consider myself beaten.“

Angered, Shioda tried to immobilize Mushashi, but he was unable to cross the line Musashi had indicated, as though there were an energy field around Mushashi’s body that protected him. Persuaded of Musashi’s art, Shioda asked to be allowed to take his place among his students. Since he also appreciated Shioda’s art of the staff, Musashi had his students study it. What is usually called „the staff of the School of Musashi“ has its origin in Shioda’s art (pp. 110-111).

The point of this story as we understand it is that being ready and awake is a powerful state of being. The master presented no opening for an attack, nor did he have any need to attack. In other words, for the master, he was not facing an enemy--a stranger who triggered 3-F reactions. As well, the master’s openness to the art of Shioda demonstrates a lack of need to be expert in all things and an acknowledgement of the teacher’s existence in many possible locations. In relational experiences, the possibility of being open, even vulnerable, exists. Such openness allows for contact, connection, and transformation. Here are two examples from the life experience of one of the authors of this paper, Avraham Cohen:

I am walking on a main street. I see a man who is not dressed well. He is lying on his side and has something liquid that he is consuming. He looks at me as I come by and says, “The dream died.” Without hesitation I reply, “I know.” He continues to look at me. I cannot discern any sense that he has recognized me or my response.

In the above story, a small human moment of contact with the strange, with Otherness, took place. Cohen made his best effort to engage with the stranger. Cohen as the martial artist did not react to the strange with one of the 3-F states. In the way that he experienced the encounter, a small spark of the human spirit was exchanged between him and this stranger. Here is Cohen again:

I am walking on a main street. A street dwelling person whom I have seen before is sitting on the sidewalk. He is relatively young, with long hair and beard. He is wearing a pair of coloured striped leotards. I think many would see him as strange. As I approach, he looks right at me, smiles, and says, “I used to be crazy.” I look him in the eyes, smile back, and respond, “Yeah, me, too!” He laughs, and I continue down the street.

In this example, too, clearly some human connection took place. Cohen did not avoid the stranger, did not freeze in silence, and did not become hostile and dismissive. He and the street person acknowledged each other: two human beings having a moment of light-hearted contact, and stating some human truths about themselves.

The way of the martial artist is encountering the strange with an open heart, transforming hostility into hospitability, thus befriending the world and creating harmony.

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