

ON THE ORIGINS AND ESSENCE OF PROCESSWORK

Amy and Arny Mindell's (*almost verbatim*) Introductory Talk at the first International Association of Process Oriented Psychology (IAPOP) Conference, London, England, April 2007.

AMY: I'd love to say a few things in a very feeling and personal way about the beginnings of Process Oriented Psychology as I experienced it.

A few days ago our international diplomats group was meeting, and the international students were meeting as well, and we had some very deep experiences together. For me it was a real deepening of our relationship, coming together with people that we know and others that we hadn't met yet, from around the world. A lot of people talked about their first dreams or experiences of how they became connected to this community.

I also had a dream last night connected to this event. In the dream, Arny and I were on the coast of Oregon, where we live. We were walking up a hill to our house and were met by 26 deer. They were so beautiful! Now I realize that this is the start of the 26th year of Process Oriented Psychology, and it is also April 26th! In the dream it was dusk, when the sun is setting. This is a time for me when the worlds merge, when the daytime meets the night. Staying in touch with that moment in myself -- with both worlds -- is very important for me and perhaps for others as well. I was very moved by that dream when I awoke this morning.

In any case, I'd love to say a few personal things and then Arny is going to talk about his experiences during the beginnings of processwork.

When I went to Zurich to study in the early 1980s, I went with some of my friends from Antioch College in the United States. There I found Arny and a community of people who were studying and working together. I think the atmosphere for me was both open-mindedly scientific and extremely experimental. It was full of fun and a lot of experimenting and a kind of hippie-like atmosphere in which we were ready to learn about new areas of research, new ways to understand ourselves and the world around us. It was extremely creative and exciting. At that time Arny had just published *The Dreambody*, and he was exploring new aspects of what would soon be called Process Oriented Psychology. I remember exploring our body experiences and their connection to dreams, I remember Don Juan from the Carlos Castaneda books, and learning about altered states of consciousness and movement processes, which I was very interested in at the time. Needless to say, meeting Arny, and

the journey that I began at that time, was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me.

I had come from a background in dance and theatre, and I wanted to find a way to put together my own dreamlike experiences—which I had had since I was a child—with my everyday life. I think I was on a constant search to figure out how it would be possible to accomplish that synthesis. At the same time I was longing to find something that would blend different disciplines together, such as art, psychology, and social awareness. So I was thrilled to find this multi-faceted and integrated approach.

I consider it a really great privilege to have been in Zurich at that time. Many of us went to seminars in the Alps, high up in the mountains, and would stay in amazing old houses, studying and cooking together, all the while researching, brainstorming, and talking about the real and dreamlike nature of life. I think I felt something like Alice in Wonderland, looking through the doors of everyday reality, through the “doors” of our body symptoms or relationships, through our communication signals and so forth, to find that even within the things that seemed most static or intractable, there were incredible worlds and potential creativity.

I am reminded just now of a funny story. At that time I felt like a real hippie. I was trekking around Europe with some friends. When I arrived in Zurich I had these enormous hiking boots. I think they were glued to my feet for weeks at a time! Now they would be utterly impractical with our luggage since we travel so much! But I remember...

ARNY: Yah, you would need a separate bag for those shoes—they were about **that** big! (Arny shows the size of Amy’s shoes)

AMY: I remember one of the first things Arny said to me when I met him was “Ah, follow your feet!” I thought, *what?* And then I looked down and saw these enormous things on my feet!

I think those feet (often minus the boots) have taken me on amazing paths and journeys together with Arny. And they were probably the beginning of earth-based psychology, which is the newest area that we’ve been exploring; following our feet and our direction from the earth!

In 1986 we began to travel around the world. We went to many different places and many different continents, including Asia, Australia, Africa, and others as well. We also worked with the Esalen Institute, a major growth center in the United States. Through the years we have presented talks at many different types of psychological conferences, such as humanistic, transpersonal, Gestalt, and Jungian conferences, at scientific conferences, as

well as organizational development conferences. During that time we also worked a great deal with people in coma and near-death conditions. Those experiences with people in coma touched me more than almost anything else in my life; being so close to people as they were going through these deep altered states, sometimes very near to death. I think I learned more about the essence of life and the essence of death from those experiences than anywhere else in my life; it was incredibly moving. We also explored the area of worldwork and many other applications of processwork that you'll be experiencing here in this conference, with lots of wonderful presenters.

During that time the Swiss group and the Swiss school began to develop and grow, and international groups began to pop up in various places, and in 1990 Arny and I moved to the United States, along with some of our friends.

My central interest years ago, was exploring the feeling quality behind our work—not only the skills, but the feeling and spiritual attitudes behind what we do. These feeling qualities give rise to, and bring to life, our various skills. I wanted to focus on the “how” of what we do. I called these feeling qualities “metaskills” and saw them as the living reflection of our deepest belief in practice. Today, I’m very interested in exploring what we call 721 feedback; a multidimensional approach to education and supervision for therapists and facilitators, but also for education in general. 721 refers to the sum of the numbers 360, 360, and 1. The first 360 is for feedback from all around, that is from everyone and everything in everyday reality. The second 360 is for feedback from all around the world of dreams, from all dream figures and experiences. And 1 is for feedback from the world of the essence, from the basis of who we are.

$360 + 360 + 1$ makes 721. 721 enhances education by incorporating an even more multi-faceted and multidimensional approach to learning. 721 feedback helps us notice and value different styles of learning and different levels of experience while interacting with one another during the educational process.

As some of you know, I’ve also been steeped in the application of processwork to art, music, puppetry, and most recently animation. For me, learning animation has been extremely difficult. Technology is a real challenge for me, but I love the endless creative possibilities that animation offers. I hope eventually to create an animated musical film about basic processwork concepts.

To close, I would like to say that I feel that this conference reminds me of those early years in Switzerland. Even though the community has grown very large and very international, and even though we may not have the same direct contact that we had in earlier times, I still feel the same spirit; the interest in learning and growing, and the hope of making a richer world for everyone. That has always been at the core of what we've been doing. So it's lovely to be with you here, whether you consider yourself to be more of an insider or more on the outside of the processwork community, I just want to thank everybody for coming together and for what each of you are doing for the world.

ARNY: Thank you, Amy. (*Applause*) We get along pretty well. (*Amy and Arny stand looking at one another, then hold each other's hands and, leaning back, speak to one another briefly before Arny continues.*)

When I can't do something, she holds me; when she can't do something, I'm there. Whenever we prepare and begin to do something together, we do this movement, this teamwork movement together. It is a kind of meditation.

I'd like to talk about my experience of the origins of processwork and a brief history as I experienced it. I want to talk about the possibilities and challenges that I see facing us, and I want to talk about why this particular conference is important to me.

My experience of history; Amy's experience of history: for me, history is a dream. The truth about history is the sum of all histories. In other words, your experience of processwork, Amy's experience of processwork, plus mine is closer to the truth than mine alone. I have my own inner experiences, but I just want to stress that the truth is the sum of all. When I say the sum of all histories, I'm thinking of one of my favorite teachers, Richard Feynman, the physicist, who explained that what we call *matter* is really the sum of all possible histories, so for me, who we are and our understanding of the physical universe are two sides of the same thing. So psychology and our understanding of the universe are closely related topics; they have always been very close for me. Psychology and cosmology are relatives.

My experience of processwork began in the early 1970s when I was training at the Jung institute, in Zurich. Jung died in 1961. I had arrived in Zurich a few days after he died for some funny reason. It's those little things that some days afterward you look back on and ask, "*what was that?*" You never have a final answer, but it has always made me feel very close to Jung.

In any case, some years later, as I finished my studies at the institute, and my favorite analyst, Franz Riklin, died. At that time the Jung Institute, like all psychological institutions, was in turmoil. This group wanted to lead, and that group wanted to lead, and there was wrestling about this and that, you know; *process*, as we call it. And one of my teachers, Marie-Louise von Franz, said to all the analysts at that time, "We don't know really what to do with this wrestling, this discussion. Let's wait to have a dream."

There was so much tension that all of us were glad to drop it for the time being. And so we went home and dreamed. I dreamed about the Jung Institute situation at that time. In a way, processwork began with that dream in 1971.

In my dream, all of us Jungians at the time were fishing, but the way we dealt with the fish was a little weird: we picked up the fish out of the water, and it wasn't good what we did with the fish. I won't go into the details. I love eating fish, I'm not a purist in that respect; I'm a salmon fanatic. But in the dream, well, we killed fish and, you know, it wasn't right. I realized that we weren't getting along with the fish properly. I wanted to find a new way to interact with those fish in that dream, and I realized that we ought to jump into the water, get to know the fish first, hang out with the fish a little bit. Then when I jumped into the water in the dream, the fish smiled at me. That was the first experience I'd had of a smiling fish! And I realized in the dream that something good was happening, but I didn't know what it was. And so I climbed back onto the boat, and some of the fish followed me onto the boat. Those I could take with me.

What was I to make of that dream? I told my friends, "I had this dream about the fish, we weren't treating the fish properly." No one seemed too interested in it.

Does that describe me? Absolutely. At the time and today, I sometimes do not treat those fish properly. It's me. But it was in the context of that turmoil for me that processwork came about as an idea; how about getting along with things? You see, just before this dream I'd had this amazing experience in my practice that I just couldn't explain; it's now just coming back to me, I had forgotten it until this moment. I was working with a child who, I was told, wouldn't take his medicine. The kid had all sorts of diseases, *and* he was supposed to be a very "bad" boy. He was sitting there in my office looking like the rebel of all rebels, and the father said "He won't take his medicine," and the mother said "He won't take his medicine," and I said,

turning to the boy, "And what do you have to say?" And I looked at the child, and he went like this (*Arny makes a face and spits; laughter*).

I said, I guess he won't take his medicine. So, we could analyze the disease properties and work with the pathology of the situation, or we could go with the spit. As it was 1971, I decided to go with the spit. I said "Spit again, you little brat," and he really took the opportunity. He filled my white shirt with as much spit as he could. I asked the parents to leave for a while; they were so aghast at what I had done that they simply walked out of the room. To make the story less gross, he did a great deal of spitting, and then we spat at each other. For some reason, his symptoms got better, almost immediately. The spitting itself—he had some form of asthma as well as other difficulties—the spitting process had some sort of relieving effect on his symptoms as well as some sort of meaning. Perhaps the meaning was being a rebel was ok!

My point is, get to know the fish, the movement, move with the process, with what is happening! I was realizing, there's something else going on besides "fishing things up," analyzing the situation. There's some truth to what's happening. This realization went along with my scientific background. Appreciate nature. I want to watch what people do. Look at one another, we're amazing! Process happens all the time in relationship, process *is* relationship! You know what I mean; observe people, it's awesome. So processwork in a way began with the smiling fish dream, and it began with spitting.

This was the early 1970's. I began to think about things and realized that my own American and Eurocentric background was inhibiting me and my colleagues as well. What I mean by the *Eurocentrism* of the times is that mind, body, and community were split off from one another. The mind was one flowerpot, and the body was another flowerpot, and then, besides these flowerpots, there was the flowerpot of community over here, and then there was death over here. All these things weren't connected at all through the same earth; we were missing a paradigm that would put these different pots together. There was something really good about keeping all these flower pots separate, about separating dreams from the body, and separating dreams from relationship to focus solely on dreams. But there was something missing for me in there. I knew that there's a kind of attitude or *Eurocentrism* of which we are never aware—the cultural background from where we're coming—until we have more diversity. So I sat on the "earth" so to speak, in the process with all the individuals and groups I worked with. Some of the people I was

interested in were not able to speak; they were sick or dying, so that group of people constituted yet another culture where talking and analyzing was not very useful. What could I do, how could I work with these various types of peoples? Follow their process! Follow the fish.

The confrontation with diversity is an education unto itself. But in addition to all these areas—smiling fish, spit and diversity work—there was something else that was, for me, the origin of processwork. I have tried to explain this a dozen times to people, and I failed each time, and I plan to fail this time too, but I must try to explain it anyhow. It's the double slit experiment in physics. This experiment has to do with the double opening, or the double-slit. I must try once again to explain this. Hold your breath for a minute. It's the core of quantum physics. Imagine a screen here that assembles results. Imagine just one slit, and imagine matter—little tiny particles—can come through it. If you give particles only one slit to go through, they behave like the particles that we know. If, on the other hand, you have two openings for particles to go through, it turns out that what results looks like it was created not by particles but by waves. What we thought were particles, like electrons, turns out to look like wave, something like water waves. So physicists since 1905 have been asking themselves—and to this day it's a cutting-edge problem—what are we looking at? Is it a particle or a wave? Processwork began, for me, with an answer to that conundrum. It's particle-like, yes, it's wave-like, yes! And no to both: It's neither a particle nor a wave, it's a *process*. What happens in nature turns out to be a process. We name it as if it were a "thing" like a particle or wave. But it is a process. How it appears depends upon how you look at it. That is such a deep discovery. Was the child I mentioned a few minutes ago sick? Yes. Did the child just need psychological attention? Yes. And neither! The child was in the middle of a process, and what appears depends upon how you look at him.

I just want to say process is something that is unknown and self-revealing. When you step into it, you swim with the fish so to speak until the process reveals its own nature, that is until the fish jump into the boat. You can try to define things at first, but your definitions and states are not the big point, they are only a small part of life itself.

AMY: So what appears to be true in the moment depends on how you look at it.

ARNY: Yes. If I look at the child from the viewpoint of pathology, which is extremely important, I see only one thing. If I look at him as if he were a dreamer I will try to understand and analyze him through his dreams—and

that's important. But the whole truth is a process that moves in between *things*, in between concepts, terms, and *states*. The truth is never a noun, a fixed entity; it is a shifting palette of adjectives and adverbs. For those of us who like to think about these things, it's a paradigm shift. Most of us, if not all of us, are educated more or less in terms of states. It's this or it's that. State-oriented thinking is fixed, but this double-slit experiment, and our experiences with human beings and with dreams, always moving from this to that, gives us the sense of a paradigm shift trying to happen in the background. We are in the midst of an ancient Taoistic, or modern process-oriented, paradigm shift.

With the concept of process all sorts of new experiences began to open up for me at the time. And I also began to bring in the experience of dreaming, to say that it was OK to be in an altered state, to dream. By allowing the dreaming into everyday life, following the body signals and fantasies, all sorts of new experiences popped up for me.

Thus, the deepest origins of processwork are connected with dreaming, and with Aboriginal history, where people always follow the dreaming of the land, or have hoped to follow the dreaming of the land. The origins lie in quantum physics, and they lie in all the friends that I had in the 1970s and 1980s, many of whom are sitting here right now and who were crazy enough to experiment with me.

What happened next makes me feel so warm! I began to think about the body, I began to work with body experiences, and I said to people "What are you experiencing in your body?" Someone came and said "Oh, no, I have a bad heart—it's clenched, it's clutching inside of me," and then I would say to him, "well, that description is a starting point. Let's clutch a little, and go sensitively into that experience." Wonderful insights and often great physical relief resulted. So I felt encouraged to gently follow whatever was going on, and things unfolded in the most magical manner. Suddenly that man who felt his heart area "clenching", clenched his fist a bit like the feeling in his chest, grinned, looked at me and simply said, "Arny, I am too nice!". The pains in his chest relaxed as he explained how much he enjoyed making a fist and thinking about how he could use his strength usefully in his life. Having hope is important; getting beyond concepts, at least temporarily following the fish is important.

The everyday mind and its definition are also part of the process. It is important to follow dreaming which evolves into the states of the everyday mind and out of them again. The everyday mind is often an allopathic mind. It wants to go against whatever is bothering you. "What is wrong with me?" Or

"I ought to do this" or "I ought to do that," "I haven't done enough yet," "Where am I with my life?" "I haven't yet succeeded at all the things that I thought I should be doing, I must change the bad things and make all things good!" All that sort of stuff goes on ad infinitum! The everyday mind is part of our dreaming. You may never really give yourself enough chance to be the rationalist that you are. If you follow your process, you're dreaming, it emerges sometimes as an everyday mind, and -- given the chance --that too is an amazing dreaming fish!

Once I realized that the rational mind is produced by the dreaming process, I decided to go back to my MIT studies and bring in information theory. How about *channels*? Some of my friends at the time said, "If you bring in channels, that will kill the unconscious" (*laughter*). Dreaming had become such an important thing, people feared their rational mind! Ahh, the 1960's, 70's and 80's. (*Laughter*)

Following process became my goal, following nature, following the body, following experience as it emerged in the different channels of experience. I found that dreaming processes appear in the form of body signals and you can video the dreaming! You can see people dreaming, you can see it in their eyes, you don't have to ask them "What are you dreaming?", "Why are you dreaming?", "What did you dream?" Look at them! A lot of people with whom I worked as a Jungian analyst didn't dream, and they felt badly about it. And so now I was able to recognize the evidence of dreams in everyday life.

But, you know, following process is such an ancient skill. I was all excited: "Ooh, I am doing something new! Isn't that a big deal?" Actually, it's not! People have always been doing it. I mean, farmers have always done it; plant in the springtime. Harvest in the fall. Dreaming in everyday life is ancient. Most people go to bed when it gets dark, and most people get up when it's light; they follow process. We are all processworkers. Every one of us is a process expert. I had to relearn that very important point—that I wasn't doing something new and unusual; actually, everyone has always done it. We just don't identify ourselves with our processes.

And at this time when I was thinking about following process I made a friend called Klaus, *Klausler*, he called himself. He was a Swiss person from the Alps, a hermit. He is no longer alive. I was in my late twenties and early thirties, and he was in his late seventies, and he and I became best friends, and he taught me how to hunt and a lot about processwork.

I have to tell you this story because it belongs to the origins of processwork for me.

He said, "Everyone must hunt." But he didn't have the money to buy a rifle or a hunting license. But he hunted, nevertheless. Well, you know, he was a hermit and lived in the woods and felt he did not have to go along with the licensing or tax rules! He had his own hunting method that he had learned from his grandfather. And the hunting method was this; you wait for a dream to hunt! He learned to hunt through dreaming, through trapping and shouting, and never used a gun.

He was one of my great teachers. Before hunting, we would go to sleep in his cabin waiting for the fox. I said, "What are we waiting for?", and he said "Shhh! Just dream"! We were both snoring away. And after a while Klaus would suddenly wake up and shout, "Yyes! Yes! Let us go and get the fox!" And I said, "Really, how do you know we can find a fox?" "Shut up and come on!" he'd shout. So we went outdoors, we ran over to the place he had dreamed, and sure enough there was a fox. And I won't go through the details of the amazing yelling and screaming and the rest of his non-firearms methods. Let me just say, we had a very hearty and tasty breakfast.

(laughter)

Those things were meaningful for me: the dream of the smiling fish, the spitting child, quantum physics, Klaus and the fox. Each of them gave me courage. I thought "Oh my god, these people know how to do things." And I felt so good when I remembered Taoism and Lao Tse, who was saying "follow nature, follow process" thousands of years ago. Buddhists, Taoists... there was really nothing new, in a way. And I want to stress the importance of the "nothing new" because everything always seems so new and exciting—and it's not new and it is new at the same time.

So, once the idea of following process became important to me, I thought to myself, *is this psychology?* I am really interested in the *whole of nature*. I am interested in the individual, in relationships, in family dynamics. I am interested in large groups, I am interested in climate change, in geology, in the evolution of cities, I am interested in nature. How will processwork interact in the future with the study of the cosmos? These were all things I was thinking about. Technical thinking helped me a great deal. Quantum thinking is an incredibly mysterious and confusing field where you have to depend upon mathematics. You no longer can grasp the reality of things.

The *Quantum Mind* was one of the great inner work problems I have had with myself: could I ever write such a book about quantum physics and

psychology? And I want to say, Amy, it literally was you who made that book possible, because I had to explain it to you and wade through all the complexes you and I got into, trying to explain quantum theory.

AMY: I knew nothing! It was like a completely different language, but you struggled with me and stayed with it.

ARNY: Your so-called “knowing nothing” was the teacher for me because I realized that if I couldn’t explain it to you, then I didn’t understand it. There was a lot that I didn’t understand, and learning it well enough to explain to you was very helpful. When you need to do something that you think is new and that you may not be able to explain to somebody, it means you haven’t understood it yourself.

That *Quantum Mind* was read not just by scientists but also by some psychologists was a great shock to me. Although most of you sitting here will probably never read that book, I can only say how important it was to me (*laughter*).

Did you read it? (*lots of laughter*) How many of you read *Quantum Mind*? Now I am putting you on the spot (*lots of laughter; someone calls out “I tried”*). There are a lot of people here, and I got to a little edge here, I can see that. Public edges, sharing your public edges, sharing your edges to speak in public—always good but hard to do! I had to work on myself last night before I decided to speak a little about physics in public. When I was talking with Amy, we did our teamwork thing together and at the same time I had to work on myself. I went back to my signature field, to my process mind. I thought of the Oregon coast and the ocean, so it’s amazing that you dreamt of the coast last night. The spirit of that coast makes me play and splash more than usual. That helps me over my shyness, that is my public edge to be out here, on stage, talking with you and yet feeling, to some small extent, at home inside myself. Mmmmm.

In any case, quantum thinking led me to the idea that there are essence-like experiences behind everyday reality. I realized from my study of quantum physics that when a little thing flickers, or flirts trying to catch our attention, there is something organizing that sudden attention to a particular flirt. I found out (with some research) that it’s the quantum potential, the quantum mind, what I am now referring to as the process mind that organizes our entire journey through life. This organizing principle is definitely one of the cutting edges of processwork. We want to know more about the principles that govern us. What is the nature of these principles? What is the nature of the experiences to which they give rise? This focus is an important piece of work,

at least for me, for the future. I am working on this area all the time. These organizing principles are behind the whole of it.

Slowly another general idea, my concept of deep democracy emerged from quantum physics. It was from quantum physics and spiritual ideas such as those found in Taoism and aboriginal earth-based psychologies that I understood the general nature of deep democracy. As some of you know, deep democracy implies the importance of representing all levels of reality. We have the innate freedom to share your thoughts about everyday reality, and at the same time to live your dreaming experiences. Deep democracy implies the importance and the freedom to represent not just everyone in everyday reality, but also all the experiences of our dreams, and our essence-like unity experiences as well. Deep democracy is both psychological and political. It is the freedom and importance of diversity, and the freedom for our infinite natures, that are beyond duality, to be represented. In my mind, deep democracy is a kind of cultural revolution for modern times. We all live all levels and experience them in others during the time and space of 24 hours. We are all involved in diversity issues, dreaming, and the deepest form of imageless sleep. We just don't always do it consciously and with agreement. We need to create a conscious agreement for admitting our whole selves as individuals and as groups and organizations. Creating such an agreement is, for me, one of our cutting-edge personal and multi-cultural tasks. Deep democracy is a general principle: the freedom to be your whole self all the time. That principle carries a big piece of the meaning behind processwork, or the connection between psychology and politics.

Before ending, let's think about the future of processwork. We are facing many challenges. Think of the wide spectrum of applications of processwork we've discussed and what you will see and hear at this conference. There's still a great deal of study needed to understand various aspects of inner work, relationships and world work, comawork and near death experiences. We need to know more about the processes of children and large organizations; about working with people in so-called normal states of consciousness and working with people in very reduced, or altered states of consciousness, including vegetative states. What can we learn about all these areas? We are at the very beginnings in some ways.

How do we deal with these nano-experiences in which things happen very quickly? And how do those nano-experiences connect us from one moment to the next, and also relate individual life to the evolution of our planet? How are our moment to moment experiences connected with the

meteors that are striking the earth from time to time? What's the relationship between your sentient experience and what's happening with sunbursts, gas bursts on the surface of the sun, or in the rest of the cosmos? What about the expansion of the universe? What does that do to you? Can you interact with it? Who are we, and how are we connected to the whole universe?

These are big questions. And there are many new applications challenging us. However whatever these challenges and questions may be, the greatest challenge for me is not only to create new insights and help our selves and others, but to also remember nature, the Tao or spirit behind process. For me that's the essence of processwork. Watch and study what happens, remember life is the teacher. Notice the moment, wonder about life.

This conference is important to me in part because it gives us a chance to know one another, to update theory and practice, and it gives us a chance to recognize that processwork is **you**. **You** are co-creators of it, and what you experience and what you learn from your dreaming, from nature makes you too a creator of what we are doing. That is the feeling that I have. The community of all learners, and their discoveries is for me, the future.

That's all I have to say at the moment—I'll stop now. Thanks Amy. And thank to all of you very much.

(Applause)