**Reflections by David C. Whyte from his book *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words***

I’m posting the following two short essays to help practitioners explore a question that came up during our very rich discussion of contentment. The question had to do with the relationship between grasping and the urge to hide and/or withdraw from. This is an area worth exploring because we very easily assume that there’s something slightly pathological and/or wrong in wanting to hide/withdraw. There might be, but Whyte’s essays introduce some much-needed fresh air to our consideration of them.

**Hiding**

“Hiding is a way of staying alive. Hiding is a way of holding ourselves until we are ready to come into the light. Hiding is one of the brilliant and virtuoso practices of almost every part of the natural world: the protective quiet of an icy northern landscape, the held bud of future summer rose, the snowbound internal pulse of the hibernating bear. Hiding is underestimated. We are hidden by life in our mother’s womb until we grow and ready ourselves for our first appearance in the lighted world; to appear too early in that world is to find ourselves with the immediate necessity for outside intensive care.

“Hiding done properly is the internal faithful promise for a proper future emergence, as embryos, as children or even as emerging adults in retreat from the names that have caught us and imprisoned us, often in ways where we have been too easily seen and too easily named.

“We live in a time of the dissected soul, the immediate disclosure: our thoughts, imaginings and longings are exposed to the light too much, too early and too often; our best qualities squeezed too soon into a world already awash with ideas that oppress our sense of self and our sense of others. What is real is almost always, to begin with, hidden, and does not want to be understood by the part of our mind that mistakenly thinks it knows what is happening. What is precious inside us does not care to be known by the mind in ways that diminish its presence.

“Hiding is an act of freedom from the misunderstandings of others, especially in the enclosing world of oppressive secret government and private entities, attempting to name us, to anticipate us, to leave us with no place to hide and grow in ways unmanaged by a creeping necessity for absolute naming, absolute tracking and absolute control. Hiding is a bid for independence—from others, from mistaken ideas we have about ourselves, from an oppressive and mistaken wish to keep us completely safe, completely ministered to, and therefore completely managed. Hiding is creative, necessary, and beautifully subversive of outside interference and control. Hiding leaves life to itself, to become more of itself. Hiding is the radical independence necessary for our emergence into the light of a proper human future.”

**Withdrawal**

“Withdrawal can be the very best way of stepping forward, and done well—a beautiful, freeing act of mercy—and as an art form, underestimated in this time of constant action and engagement. So much of what we are involved with, in even the highest cause, becomes involvement at the busy periphery, where the central conversation has been lost to the outer edges of what was, to begin with, a very simple central invitation. Withdrawal is often not what it looks like—disappearance—no, to withdraw from entanglement can be to appear again in the world in a very real way and begin the process of renewing the primary, essential invitation again.

“Though life does seem to be determined to be a beautiful and entrancing distraction—just as we ourselves are a distraction to others, testing them as we test ourselves and our mutual sincerity—our participation in this dance of distraction also makes more real, and more necessary, our ability to return to essential ground, to an essential person or an essential work.

“We stick to the wrong thing quite often, not because it will come to fruition by further effort, but because we cannot let go of the way we have decided to tell the story, and we become further enmeshed even by trying to make sense of what entraps us, when what is needed is a simple, clean breaking away.

“To remove ourselves entirely and absolutely, abruptly and at times uncompromisingly, is often the real and radically courageous break for freedom. Unsticking ourselves from the mythical Tar Baby, seemingly set up, just for us, right in the middle of our path, we start the process of losing our false enemies, even our false friends, and most especially the false sense of self we have manufactured to live with them: we make ourselves available for the simple purification of seeing ourselves and our world more elementally and therefore more clearly again. We withdraw, not to disappear, but to find another ground from which to see; a solid ground from which to step, and from which to speak again, in a different way: a clear, rested, embodied voice, our life as a suddenly emphatic statement, one we can recognize as our own, and one from which, now, we have absolutely no wish to withdraw.”