

## Living in the Unfinishedness

The lawn hasn't been mowed for quite a long time. I'm not in a partnership with a man at the moment, and I regularly explain to myself that I don't want to be in a relationship if it is just going to mean that there's someone to help me mow the lawn.

And yet the lawn is a struggle. If it hasn't been mowed for a while, it takes five tanks of fuel to mow it. That sounds a simple enough equation in my head – five tanks of fuel, three hours or so of solid work, build up a real sweat (oh-so-wonderful for the post-natal figure) – and I end up with results that I can bask in. There's something that so lifts the spirit about freshly mowed lawns (or a freshly cleaned house, or a freshly weeded garden bed or piles of washing put away).

But actually I don't have the faintest idea if it would take three hours to mow my lawn, because I've never mowed it all at once.

I start this morning, and getting started is quite an ordeal. Feed baby several times, meditate with baby in lap (following her waking the instant I slip into a meditative state), take baby and dog and cat for a walk down to dam, set baby up in shade with sprinkler to watch and flowers to play with, make mental note that I still need to feed the chook, feed baby again just to make sure she's really content – then start mower (and on the first pull!)

I mow down past the garden bed which I weeded a few weeks ago, noticing all the weeds that I thought were gone, and remind myself that it is all about being in the moment, and that what I am doing is mowing the lawn. I will be fully in this moment, in this experience of mowing, and it feels so pleasurable as I cut a swathe in the long grass.

Sophie beams at me as I go past, the scent of cut grass fills the air, and the little section I've mowed looks sensational. I see how much more there is to do, and I really look forward to doing it, getting through it, to that wonderful, tired feeling of success when the lawn is done (*already out of the moment again, about one minute after I got into it*).

After five passes with the mower, Sophie is in inconsolable tears. Five passes on a five tank lawn. Chook still not fed. Washing not done. Morning meditation not as I had hoped.

Sophie and I have moved past the stage of that madness of early motherhood, of being so head over heels that I'll do absolutely anything for her, any time. A form of insanity, according to the theorists, normal after giving birth. Just as she is less and less content to gaze at the clouds and sleep in her pram, I'm feeling more and more of an itch to do something for myself, and by myself, without anybody in my arms or latched onto my nipple or asking me 6,000 questions a minute (that's Emma, my five-year-old).

And in the flux and dynamic of this relationship is meant to come the forming of the infant's self structure. Meet their needs as much as humanly possible, and then as postnatal insanity fades, and common-sense selfishness returns, the needs are met less quickly and less perfectly, and the child develops their own resilience, their own ability to self-sooth, their sense of themselves.

The theory seems to make sense, but it's not something that you can see in the day to day. It's a process, as unfinished as my lawn, and with the results of my efforts much less visible.

The process of nurturing is literally that – a process. It's never finished - like the lawn, like the washing, like the cleaning, like the making of meals. It's almost invisible – like the cement between the bricks, you can sometimes see if it's not there, but you often don't really notice it when it is. We spread our energy thinly and widely, as we give love and care.

Results are hard to see. Perhaps when our children grow up, we will see some outcome for all that energy that has flowed, all that conscious thought and loving – but then perhaps we won't, either.

With any enterprise, it's hard to draw the mind away from the tantalising prospect of what it will look like when it is finished. It's hard to be in the humble beginnings or in the raw transitions of growth without feeling the strong urge to resolve it, to bring it to completion.

But of course life is unfinished. That's the process of living. And the discipline of nurturing the spirit seems to me to be about regularly pulling myself back from the urge to resolve the domestic chaos, the urge to complete the grand scheme - to instead bring my highest self fully into this moment. "I am that I am that I am".

And still do what needs to be done.

I bring the lawnmower lever to the stop position and switch the petrol off, and it chugs on a few moments longer. Even the lawnmower doesn't want to stop! The thought enters my head that the mower will be hard to start next time, because it doesn't like being stopped and then started again hot. I think of the chicken, still not fed. Her morning-laid egg will be hot in the shed by now. I leave the mower in position, ready to continue exactly where I have stopped. I lay my gardening gloves on top of it. It's something of a futile gesture of optimism.

I pick up the baby. A big cuddle and a chat and a tickle and the tears soon dry. We go in to start a new and messy process: lunch.

- Nicola Hoskins, January 2001