

Chapter 1

A New Lens for Healing

Why are we born? I believe that this is a most profound question and that in our seeking to explore it, can give our lives that ultimate depth of meaning and fulfillment we all yearn for. What this question opens us to is to search out the lives, words, and teachings of our fellow human beings, who down through the centuries, were graced to awaken to this, our universal quest. All the world's major religious traditions, including the philosophical traditions of humankind, have sought to answer this deepest of questions that has arisen out of our collective human experience.

Having been a member of a Trappist monastic community, which is founded on the Roman Catholic tradition, I believe that one answer to "Why we are born?" is to realize the twofold love of God and neighbor that the historical Jesus opens to us by his life, death, and what is termed his "Resurrection."

In my study and practice of Buddhism, while I was involved in interreligious dialogue as a monk, I found that the ultimate in life is to realize the Bodhisattva path. This path is the twofold devotion to the forces of light in the Universe and to the supreme wish that all our fellow beings may experience happiness and be free from suffering.

In turning to the other major religions – Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, and Islam – we can find the twofold devotion to the eternal-divine source, in whatever term this is expressed, and to all our fellow beings. There is another equally deep question, however, that runs through all these

traditions: What is the cause of our suffering? What is it that blocks or impedes us from realizing deep down the universal call from the eternal-divine source, or Spirit, to serve the good of all beings?

In the pages of this book you will read that a significant cause is the repression of early childhood traumas that we experienced in the family system in which we were raised, as well as other traumas that we experience throughout our lives. What is crucial to know is: How can we be freed of whatever negative mental/emotional/physical ills these traumatic experiences are causing us in the present?

This book offers focused meditations: the guidance and body meditations that open us to experience our “inner truth.” And here it is this inner truth of ourselves, which is free of all suffering and can release us from many of the ills which oppress us.

Another term for inner truth in this book is the “innocent perception” of ourselves as a *beloved sacred spirit-person*. This image is chosen from those graced individuals whose experience of the Spirit breaking through to them gave birth to the world’s major religions. In their embodiment of divine loving qualities we recognize what it means to be a beloved sacred spirit-person. We glimpse this in considering the words of two of the most significant of the Enlightened Ones, Jesus and Buddha:

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. *Matthew 5:44-46*

Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another. As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child, even so should one cultivate a limitless heart with regard to all beings. So with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings; radiating kindness over the entire world. *Sutta Nipatta 1,8*

In these words, we see the highest blessing that our universal humanity has given voice to in our current phase of evolution. We behold humans like ourselves who reveal to us the ultimate human quest, which is *to be receptive to the divine self-communication of love from the depth of the Spirit within us.*

In this book it is the way of devotion that is followed to realize this. When anyone, who in searching for truth turns to the Enlightened Ones, those great teachers of our humanity, they can awaken to who **they** truly are. For here it is the radiant divine core of the one/s they are devoted to, awakening the experience of the core of divine radiance within them.

There is nothing higher we can experience than divine self-communication that reveals us to ourselves as the beloved sacred spirit-person we are created/called to be. As we experience the innocent perception of ourselves as a beloved sacred spirit-person, it opens up to us immense blessing, healing and illumination in our lives.

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Spirit, Transcendent Loving Wisdom

Innately, in our earliest beginnings, we all yearn to reach out and experience unconditional love. This deepest yearning proceeds from the very source of love itself, which is eternal-divine outpouring love.

An image for Spirit I offer in this book is transcendent loving wisdom. Transcendent loving wisdom, to use the words of the Renaissance poet Dante Alighieri, is “the love that moves the sun and other stars.” It is the outpouring of the divine all-permeating light, the eternal spirit of love, which we are called to awaken to and manifest in the service of all beings.

Spirit, transcendent loving wisdom, may be described as the “maternal aspect” of the ultimate sacred mystery, which brings forth, nourishes, sustains, and liberates all that exists in the world. It is the source, guide, and final goal of the created Cosmos, our lives, of all that is.

As the divine core of human personhood, transcendent loving wisdom is the source of human love and friendship, the source of goodwill and justice among peoples, and our caring for Mother Earth and all her creatures. It is the source of all the acquired human wisdom that has sought to uplift humanity. And as we are receptive to “her presence” we can be guided rightly.

In this book, I refer to Spirit as “she/her” to highlight the maternal, nurturing aspect of the eternal mystery of love. We did not have to be created. Only the mystery of the ultimate freedom of divine love, or Spirit, accounts for the world, anyone/anything in it.

Human consciousness is a calling, a challenge, and a task to grow in consciousness. What is meant here is to experience our oneness with each other and the natural world from the loving ground of Spirit from within the depths of our own being. Only in this way can we overcome the inner divisions in our hearts that are the cause of our ills.

I believe that innocent perception is crucial for our well-being. The message of this book is that it is the new lens for healing that we need today. It truly is, because in our awareness of it, we can release anything that might arise in us that would cause harm to ourselves, or to our fellow beings.

What above all we need is to recover the innocent perception of ourselves. It is our birthright, given in our creation and can never be lost, even though it may be overlaid by the suffering we experience. As we recover innocent perception and cultivate it through a spiritual practice, we can experience those life-giving, harmonizing energies of Spirit, transcendent loving wisdom guiding us in all things.

I believe we need to be clear of *what is of ultimate value that we can trust, and trust completely, totally, without reservation*. What is ultimate in life is the truth of the divine vision of love that continually creates/calls us for the sake of love alone. This ultimate in life is expressed by St. Paul and is echoed in the world's major religious traditions:

If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not

rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. *1 Corinthians 13:1-7*

When we experience, even if only for an instant, the love that is patient, kind, not envious ... we know from within what is worth living for. We may also understand this as the intuition of our inner truth arising from our sacred depths in which we awaken to our own unique call to embody the qualities of love in the above text. It is this deep down, intuitive/instinctual/gut knowing of the beloved sacred spirit-person that we are each created/called to be that echoes throughout this book.

A New Vision of Reality

With the evolution that has taken place over the past hundred years or so in the fields of religion, science, philosophy, and psychology, it can be said that we now have a basis for a universal spirituality, a new vision of reality. In this new vision, we understand ourselves, all beings as a vast interdependent, interpenetrating, intercommunicating web of relationships that mutually influence each other – either for good or for ill. We can no longer stand apart and view reality as objects separate from ourselves.

Profound insights that are very relevant today are those expressed by Fritjof Capra. He is a theoretical physicist of many years who left physics in the mid-1980s and turned to the life sciences. According to him the mechanistic view of the universe as some kind of a machine, composed of elementary building blocks, which also includes viewing the body as a machine,

and the mind as separate entity, has now given way to a dynamic view of life as an inseparable network of relationships.

The structure and behavior of each living system in this network, whether this is bacteria, plants, animals, human beings, or the planet as a whole – is determined not from without, but from within the inherent dynamism of its own living system. In this book, it is from the core of divine radiance within the depths of our own being that we open to experience those life-giving energies that can regenerate our minds and bodies, and inspire us with divine creativity to bring forth love and harmony in our world.

We participate with all beings in the dynamic unfolding of the entire Cosmos that arises in each moment from the loving ground of Spirit. The uncreated, eternal spirit of love manifests herself in the harmony, beauty, and order of the created Cosmos, as a mystic, or astrophysicist might be able to render it. This same outpouring of divine energy, or “divine consciousness” is the heart of the Cosmos, and “the Heart of our own heart.” What is crucial is our awakening to this enlightened mind/heart.

To See with the Eye of the Heart

There is no higher blessing than to awaken and see with the eye of the heart. This is expressed in the beatitudes in the New Testament, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

The more that we focus on the spiritual vision of our humanity, which is the core of our divinity, we are attuned to the unbounded power of love, truth, and goodness. Spiritual masters have said that more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. To experience that sacred

space, which prayer and meditation opens up within us, is a deep treasure indeed, the pearl of great price.

With this in mind, we might open our imagination to what our being able to see ourselves and others through the lens of innocent perception could create in the many interactions that make up our lives. From my own experience in the practice of meditation, I believe that when we see ourselves/others in innocent perception we unleash a power of blessing and healing far beyond what we can imagine.

Injury and Trauma

There is much more an awareness of meditation and other spiritual practices which have come from the meeting of the religions of East and West. Most significantly, new insights of psychology have made us aware of how much we are affected by trauma. From reading Alice Miller's book, *Banished Knowledge*, I was made aware of how we are profoundly affected by childhood traumas. Every child born into this world hopes that they will be shown unconditional love from those entrusted to their care. What can be said about a child, who in hoping to receive such love, instead experiences some form of abuse?

Abuse covers a wide range of experiences in which we may never have experienced genuine love from our caregivers. We may have felt rejected, abandoned, manipulated, controlled, or we may have experienced physical violence, or sexual abuse. Married couples often have unresolved "issues" they have experienced from their parents of which they are unaware. And as they

progress in their marriage, these unresolved issues, left unhealed, can impact both themselves and their children in adverse ways.

It is above all when we experience trauma early in life that we can fall prey to destructive tendencies and desires that are harmful to ourselves and others. What is most damaging in early traumatic experiences is that the overload of emotional pain they cause gets repressed for us into our child's body without our even being able to be aware of it. These repressed energies block us from realizing the vital, loving, caring life we are called to unless we can find a way to allow them to be healed and released.

Modern neuroscience has shed light on how early trauma affects our brain. If we did not experience being genuinely loved and cared for it can leave lasting traces in our mind and behaviors. A painful past can wire us for selfishness, bias, defensiveness, and other ills of humankind.

I believe that almost everyone experiences to some degree those inescapable generational ills that get passed on. At the present time there is a greater awareness of how we are affected by trauma and of our need to find a way we can heal. This includes the use of psychedelics, which open us to altered states of consciousness that can be the springboard for healing from traumas we have experienced.

When we experience suffering that comes from grief in relationships, from ill health, and from financial hardship, how is it possible to live free from fear, and to discover true happiness? How can we be freed from being the prisoners of our past? The insights presented in this book have come from my own journey of seeking healing from the trauma of early childhood sexual abuse. I was unaware of this in monastic life, but after 25 years the effects of the abuse began to

come up. As I experienced this, divine loving providence made me aware that I needed to leave monastic life and search out a path of healing.

Healing Through the Way of Devotion

As I left monastic life to explore a path of healing work, the Spirit guided me through many ups and downs. What I discovered over the past 20 years is that to be freed from the hurts of life we need to be liberated from perceiving ourselves as victims of whomever, or whatever, has diminished our life.

The Spirit in us, as the outpouring mystery of eternal love, cannot be injured. The guidance and body meditations offered in this book have come out of my search to heal after I left monastic life. What was a watershed experience for me was when I was faced with the immense pain and grief of early abuse coming up, I found that I could call upon my eternal source/spiritual family for healing. This is recounted in chapter two on my journey.

Our “spiritual family” is all – both on this side and the other side, on earth and in heaven – who are devoted to the eternal source of love. And it is from their devoted love that they see, know, and love us. We always need to be aware that eternal source/spiritual family are inseparable or “one.” In this book words that introduce “eternal source/spiritual family” are always “my/your/our/their.”

These terms express what is most intimate and most personal to us. I was blessed by a very profound mentor at the Abbey. He was the Abbot when I entered, and before becoming Abbot he lived as a hermit. After being Abbot for six years, he returned to his hermitage. I would see him

regularly for spiritual direction, and he would always say: “We each have a personal call from God and we need to ‘personalize’ our spiritual practice.”

When we invoke “my eternal source/spiritual family” we open to experience our deep intimacy with the eternal communion of love in which we are seen, known, loved, and understood in the divine vision of love that creates/calls us. The intuitive sense here is that we awaken to the “one core of divine radiance” within the eternal source, our spiritual family, and above all within the depths of our own hearts.

It is ignorance of our communion with our eternal source/spiritual family wherein the divine vision of love is absent that is the cause of suffering within our families of origin, and also the family of humankind. When we follow the yearning of the Spirit to experience the love that radiates forth from our eternal source/spiritual family, we can be channels of the immense power of this love to bring healing to our earthly families, which includes our family of origin, and the many forms of family on earth that are open to us. What is so crucial today is to create networks that open us to love, compassion, and service, which Spirit inspires in us.

Many of our fellow human beings down through the ages have responded to the universal call from Spirit given to humanity, and so can we today. To call upon our eternal source/spiritual family is unspeakable grace. It is nothing less than to open up to recover the innocent perception of ourselves. Our spiritual family envelops our earthly family and uplifts it with blessing and healing. We are never alone. We are enveloped by a cloud of witnesses, and we can experience their unfailing love, comfort, and support, in the struggles that are inherent in our human journey.

The meditations in this book evoke within us a bearing of gratitude and humility for this holy communion of love, which is always open to us. We only need to be willing to trust that we are meant to receive it.

Where We Are at Today

I believe it is crucial to get a perspective of where we have come from that has brought us to where we are at today, so that we may change for the better. The ending of the last period of glaciation (some 15,000 to 12,000 years ago), when we lived in the hunter-gatherer phase, was followed by the transition to an agricultural phase which began roughly 12,000 to 10,000 years ago. There have been periodic collapses and transitions in civilizations' from nomadic hunter-gatherers to the present.

What is meant here is a transition from one mythological phase to another, in which the term "mythological" is understood as a perceptual lens through which we view reality. For thousands of years the mythological lens operative in civilizations was that of the need for offering sacrificial victims – humans and animals – with all the violence this unleashed in the cultural structure of societies.

When we observe human history, it is sobering to see how much viciousness, cruelty, and violence has shaped our species, and that is still very much with us. The deepest ill of our humanity, is that we are alienated to a great extent from manifesting the life-giving energies of Spirit in civilization. Evidence of this is reflected by a prevailing mindset that has dominated civilizations over the past 10,000 to 12,000 years.

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Through the mythological lens, which characterizes this dominant mindset, existence is seen as a competitive struggle in which the driving forces are grasping after wealth, power, and control. These driving forces affect every level of personal, interpersonal, and political/economic/social interactions in our present day.

Alienation

The oldest issue of humankind is alienation, understood as our being cut off from the awareness of the eternal source motivating human behavior. We do well to take to heart a profound insight from the higher spiritual traditions. It is that when we resist or ignore those secret inner promptings from Spirit, which would inspire us and give us direction, we fall prey to egocentricity.

There is a creative tension between what can be termed the “divine,” or “transcendent” pole, and the “human,” or “earthly” pole. Often we experience this tension as a yearning for completion as we experience incompleteness and suffering that is an inescapable part of our human experience.

The consequence of resisting the creative tension between the divine and human poles is that instead of being aware of the loving ground of Spirit inspiring us, we are motivated by egocentric desires: “What I want,” “What I don’t want,” to the exclusion of all else. Instead of being one with the eternal dynamism of outpouring divine, giving/receiving love within us, our love is perverted into grasping, taking, and getting power over others.

Our desires become disordered, and are opposed to our manifesting the creative, harmonizing energies of Spirit. And in this we have a karmic flow of suffering, where those who have fallen prey to egocentricity affect others adversely.

This is truly the mystery of human evil wherein we can become malicious, and in so doing, we cause suffering to ourselves, to our fellow humans/nonhumans. In every age we witness the terrifying reality of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, and misogyny.

The driving forces of capitalistic societies have given rise to political and economic structures that are brutal. Capitalism is simply one of various economic theories, which in practice has unleashed a most vicious, destructive force in civilizational history. Its foundations go back to the beginning of agricultural societies.

Among the social, political and economic relations and inventions which were developed at this time are those of master and slave, of kingly ruler and societal submission to such rule, of credit and debt, of media of exchange, of property and ownership. There is also the immense suffering caused by the colonizer/colonized.

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We witness in America today the rising of a White Christian Nationalism, which originates in white European conquerors stealing a whole continent from our indigenous brothers and sisters 400 years ago and then enslaving our Black African brothers and sisters to make that continent profitable.

In the postmodern world the “master and slave” relationship is manifest in an extremely wealthy elite, that is a handful of corporations. They control the flow of money globally, and are driven primarily by grasping after power, wealth, and control to the detriment of serving the needs of their fellow human beings. What is so insidious and destructive in such motivations is that fellow humans, other species, are viewed to large extent – whether or not this is conscious,

semi-conscious, or unconscious – from the vantage point of “getting power over, controlling and making a profit from.” It creates a vicious cycle in which humans and nature are destroyed.

Human history is very much a history of victimization. It is the grasping after power that fuels this victimization cycle, which in turn creates a lack of social justice. The lack of social justice is reflected in government policies, which cater to a wealthy elite keeping power and control. At this point in our evolution, grasping after power with attendant greed, avarice, and corruption, continues to foster a divided humanity that our earth can no longer support.

At the present time we witness a greater desire among countries for the best that open, liberal, democratic, and capitalist societies can offer. However, there is the threat of autocratic tendencies within democratic, capitalistic societies, and well as from without in autocratic/totalitarian forms of government. An instance of this is President Putin of Russia waging a war against the Ukrainian people (February 2022) who only want to live in a more open and free democracy.

Down through the centuries, experiments in liberal democracies throughout the world have given rise to the possibilities of freedom and social justice. At the same time, however, the forces of greed, avarice, and corruption have also asserted themselves. We can only hope and pray that the genuine values of compassion and social justice that are possible in an open, free, and democratic society will continue to flourish as we continue to evolve.

Buddhist’s teaching sheds light on human evil. Ignorance of the eternal transcendent reality within us gives birth to greed/grasping, and hatred/aversion, which has been so evident in human history for thousands of years. In Buddhism, the three poisons that affect our consciousness are ignorance, greed, and hatred. In the Western traditions these poisons are known as “sin.” Both ignorance and sin refer to the state of a consciousness that is alienated.

The deeply insinuated evils that are now manifesting worldwide will either be mitigated in our personal and in our communal transformation, or they will severely harm all of life in our willful persistence of ignoring the threats we face today – climate change, the undermining of a vital functioning democracy in societies, and the threat of nuclear war.

From the Mountaintop to the Marketplace

In the higher spiritual traditions a profound image is to have a “mountaintop” experience, and then to return to the “market place” with open hands to serve our fellow beings. The night before Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, speaking to his followers said, “We've been through a lot but it really doesn't matter to me anymore because I've been to the mountaintop and I only want to do God's will.”

Whenever we seek to follow our deepest yearning to awaken to Spirit, transcendent loving wisdom, immanent within the depths of our hearts, we can have a mountaintop, or a “peak” experience. In such an experience we intuit ourselves from the mystery of divine outpouring love that is the source, guide, and final goal of all that is. We become aware of our oneness with all in our joys, hopes, and sorrows and are released from our falling prey to egocentricity wherein we close ourselves off from others.

This mountaintop/market place image is reflected in step 11 of Alcoholics Anonymous. AA developed in 1935, is considered one of the most successful spiritual programs, which continues to help many people globally. In this step, one aspires by prayer and meditation to experience the

God of their understanding so that they can embody divine loving will in their life. We are all called to be the human expression of the divine. Nothing higher can we aspire to.

A very deep need has always been to rediscover the perennial wisdom of the higher spiritual and philosophical traditions that our greatest treasure lies within the depths of our hearts. We must seek this place first.

The new spiritual vision we have today is of our oneness with each other, with the vastness of the created Cosmos, which includes our planet earth. We “participate” with all beings in “the love that moves the sun and other stars.” In each moment, each breath, our lives are unfolding in the light of our eternal destiny. We are always on holy ground and the only appropriate response to this is awe and reverence for our call from Spirit to be the human expression of the divine.

We are called to be a universal brother/sister to all as we awaken to divine creativity within us to bring forth blessing for ourselves, all of humanity, Mother Earth, plants, animals, all creatures. The last words of the Buddha so relevant for any age, speaks to our need to listen within:

Be a lamp unto yourself.

Don't search for light anywhere else;

the light is already there, the fire is already there.

Just probe a little deeper into your being, enquire.

Maybe much ash has gathered around the fire....

Just probe deep inside, and you will find the spark again.

And once you have found a single spark inside you,

you will become a flame, soon

you will be a fire...

a fire that purifies, a fire that transforms,

a fire that gives you a new birth and a new being.

Be a lamp unto yourself.”