



THE  
RECOVERY  
OF *love*

*Reflections*

A Series of Discussion Papers by

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**M**y work is almost done, and I am coming to an end not only of this scribbling but also of my life. Ten years? Unlikely to be more. Could be less. Could well be less. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that I find myself reflecting on how it is I have come to be who I am and where I am, and wondering what my purpose might have been and is now. This is a time for honesty. If some people are intrepid, I think I may be trepid. Yes, there is such a word and it means timid. I think that most of those who have known me would not suppose this was so, for I have always seemed to be easy in company and full of confidence. But now I have come to see that that is simply the part I learnt to play as a child, the cloak that over time I put on to hide my insecurity and inner anxiety when 'walking on stage'. Is it like that for all of us, or just me? I don't know. Or perhaps there is more than one part of me, one bold and outgoing and the other trepid. That could be it, too, don't you think? I don't know, and now it hardly matters.

Anyway, the 'me' that is off-stage has always been much more introverted than he has appeared to be on stage and, physically at least, the adventures that I have had have not been in wild and distant places, but close by. With London as my place of work, I have always lived more or less where I am now, first in north-east Essex, with its muddy estuaries and open farmland, and now on the coast of Suffolk, with the North Sea, the shingle beach and, best of all, the tidal river Alde. The rising and the falling of the tide lies deep within my veins. Do you know that moment when the tide turns? The very moment? It is almost impossible to see, but at one moment the boats are pointing into the full and rising tide, and in the next they have swung on their moorings and are pointing into the ebb. And you can do nothing about it, but watch. Whatever words I use to describe this are as nothing to what actually happens.

I am telling you this because, as I said in Paper 1, I have come to know that I cannot write other than from where I am and from whoever it is I have become. I might wish to be someone else in some other place, but I am not. I am an old and damaged patriarch living by the sea and the river, with the great dish of sky overhead and the reed beds touched by the breeze, the cry of seagulls. And I say 'patriarch' because whether I like it or not, that is what I

was born into, and patriarchy is who I became; mostly benign rather than malign, I hope, but patriarchy none the less. And I say damaged because that's what happens in life, the knocks and bruises damage us, don't you think?

It is from this place, on the banks of the Alde, that I have come to see that my quest for Love and the Divine Feminine has always been an essential part of my being. Although I have only really known this in my later years, I now know that for all of my life, from early childhood to becoming an old man, this has been so; it has been the search for that which has been lost, not just for me but for all of us: Love and the Divine Feminine. But here's the point. What I have only very recently understood is this: that this search has not been for some great philosophical principle (although that has been part of it), in truth it has been a search for some inner meaning and for the Great Meaning, the two are entwined one with another, they are felt as a seeking for peacefulness and oneness. In some other life, some time before, I am now certain, for my sisters in the Brahma Kumaris have told me that it is so, I lived my life not in the body of a man, as I do now, but in the body of a woman. And perhaps, or rather probably, over many lives I have lived in both, first the one and then the other in a patterned sequence. And I know that in some other time I lived with and amongst women. So, in a world dominated by men, where both Love and the Feminine have been dismissed and sometimes reviled, no wonder I have felt, and still feel, a sense of loss. Sometimes, waking in the early morning, this can be almost unbearable.

I wrote about this loss in *Love and the Divine Feminine*. And at the end of the book I asked those questions that are set out in the Introduction to these papers, questions which suggest that we need to be explicit about, and attentive to, both Love and the Feminine, and that we need to open ourselves to the possibility that in trying to find our way out of the catastrophe that we are bringing upon ourselves – a toxic mixture of the degradation of Nature, climate breakdown, evident social and economic injustice, and increasing division and conflict – we need to find a different discourse and a more loving and collaborative way of being. In the end, for me at least, this requires a search for what the Buddha called *upekkhā*,

equanimity, one of the four 'divine abidings' and the foundation of them all.

As I write down those words, I am conscious of their inadequacy. After all, I write 'inner meaning', not knowing at all what that might be. This inner meaning, sometimes called 'the soul', is often described as feminine, and I like that, even if the reality beyond the image is utterly mysterious and without gender. She is my *anima*, the lost feminine part of me, and perhaps of us. Lost in the dominating and damaging bondage of patriarchy, which, over many lives, has left some of us misshapen, unable to feel what many others feel, unable to feel the pain of the other. Well, perhaps not entirely, but often; caught up in our own need to have order, to be in control, not of others, but of ourselves. Isn't that what patriarchy want? Control? Dominance? That is the real damage of patriarchy, not just the evident degradation of Nature, but the more subtle damage it has brought to each one of us, each with our own particular wounds.

The writer and visionary, Anne Baring, has a chapter towards the end of her book, *The Dream of the Cosmos*,<sup>1</sup> in which she speaks of the transformation of the soul, which she relates to the need for a new cosmic consciousness. She says that the Cosmos "calls us to become aware that we participate in its life, that everything is sacred and connected: one life; one spirit."<sup>2</sup> And she adds, "Alchemy responds to that call. It asks us to develop a cosmic consciousness."<sup>3</sup> This might sound daunting, but to find 'another language' we have to become brave or foolish enough to explore forbidden possibilities, and an understanding of the ancient practice of Alchemy is one such. For, as the seventeenth century illustration at the beginning of Anne Baring's chapter shows, Alchemy follows in the footsteps of Nature. And as we have discovered, in the work of Harmony (see Paper 8) we must let Nature be our teacher, rescuing the lost feminine hidden within Her and within ourselves. This is the first step of the Alchemical Great Work.<sup>4</sup> This is a part of our evolution:

The evolution of human consciousness on this planet is a very slow gradient of ascent from unconsciousness to self-consciousness and, ultimately, to awakened consciousness.

There are many setbacks and long periods of stagnation and incubation. The whole of humanity suffers because the increase of consciousness is so slow and the transformation needed to diminish human suffering and ignorance so difficult to implement. Now it seems that because of the turmoil in the world and the harm to the planet caused by our unconscious behaviour, our evolution is being accelerated, taking us to a point where we have to make the choice between transformation and annihilation.<sup>5</sup>

Carl Jung came to study alchemy, reconnecting solar, masculine, consciousness, with lunar, feminine consciousness, redeeming the lost aspect of spirit hidden within himself and Nature,<sup>6</sup> unifying the cosmic ground,<sup>7</sup> reconnecting us with the ancient universal unconscious, and reconnecting us with Wisdom, which reveals “the fruits of a relationship with the hidden ground of life.”<sup>8</sup>

As Anne Baring says:

Certain myths flow beneath the surface of our lives like a mighty river, connecting our superficial awareness with its roots, ready always when we are ready, to well up like a perennial spring whenever we call upon our soul for help. In European civilisation there was a wealth of ideas that had to go underground, since they could only escape persecution by being hidden in metaphor and allegory. Only now are they emerging, having been preserved for the day of their ‘resurrection’ by a strong mythological tradition expressed in alchemy on the one hand and in countless legends and stories such as the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty and the legend of the Holy Grail on the other.<sup>9</sup>

So, what can we now say about a new myth for our time, a Myth of Love? I think we can speak of this in two ways: we can speak of the universal and we can speak of the everyday. Let’s start with the second of these.

Within this series of papers, we have, again and again, come across suggestions for how we might live our everyday lives.

This includes the virtues set out in Paper 2 – loving kindness, compassion, truthfulness, patience, generosity, humility, caring for each other and for the Earth – and it includes the possibility of living within those principles of Harmony described in Paper 8, with two Great Principles – Wholeness and Connection or, when they are brought together, Relationship. Indeed, in Papers 7 and 9, we discovered that the only way for us to be if we are to avoid catastrophe is to live in partnership with each other and with the Earth, to live, to work, to speak, to be, always in right relation with each other and the Earth.

None of this is especially complicated, nor is it new. We have been told of this by all the great sages and spiritual traditions, our own and others. And the core discipline for such lives is the Discipline of Love, taking Love seriously and, with intent, putting it into practice in every moment of our lives. What stands in our way? Well, what stands in our way is a dominant patriarchal culture. I shall not waste my time speaking anymore about this old and now outworn kingdom. To do so will only take us back into a realm that we must leave behind. But – if we choose to leave it behind – we can speak of something else. And that’s the point isn’t it. That was the point of the fable of ‘The Wrong Turning (Paper 5). That is what the Old Woman said to the King:

“The only thing for you to do,” said the Old Woman, “is to care for each other and to care for the Earth as if she was your Mother. Tenderness, kindness and care. These are the qualities that you will need both to limit as much as you can the catastrophe that will come, and then to look after each other when the storms have swept many of you away.”

But did the King take her advice? Do we take her advice? Or do we turn away and say, ‘It’s too difficult’ or ‘But this is not how the world is?’ As I have said again and again, the Buddha has long taught us in the opening stanza of the Dhammapada, the world is as we think it is: ‘with our thoughts we make the world’. It is not that we cannot do what we now know to be true, but only that, despite the floods, the fires and the pestilence, we do not have the courage to do so. And the madness is we think that to ignore

these dangers, to turn away from the Discipline of Love, is to be 'realistic'. But what is this reality that we speak of? When we see where it has taken us to, how can we say it is 'just the way things are'?

This brings us to the second way of speaking, to universal principles and ultimate truth. It brings us to what, in Paper 2, John Templeton of the Templeton Foundation refers to as Love as Ultimate Reality or that of which Whitall Perry spoke in *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*:

Love is the energizing elixir of the universe, the cause and effect of all harmonies, lights, brilliance and the heat in wine and fire, it is the aroma of perfumes and the breath of the Divinity: it is the Life in all being... It is all that the texts have to say, and the more that remains unspoken.<sup>10</sup>

Or to that which Rumi taught:

Love makes the sea boil like a cauldron,  
Love reduces the mountains to sand.  
Love cracks hundreds of fissures into the heavens  
unconsciously,  
Love makes the earth tremble.  
... (God said): "If it wasn't by pure love, how could I have  
brought  
the heavens into existence?  
I have elevated the sublime celestial sphere so that you could  
understand the sublimity of Love."<sup>11</sup>

If we are, here, talking of mysterious, universal principles then it would seem that we may find great delight, and certainly something more plausible than principles of accounting.

In this work, I have presented the possibility of such Another Reality – the Perennial Philosophy in Paper 1, my own propositions in Papers 2 and 3 of Love and of Silence as being of the essence, the voices of women in Papers 4 to 6, the propositions of Riane Eisler/Douglas Fry and Kenneth Gergen in Paper 7, the principles of Harmony in Paper 8, the teachings of the Tao and

the I Ching in Paper 9, and even the possibility of an Economy of Love in Paper 10. There is no lack of data, and there is no lack of evidence of the need for change, for urgent change. There is only a lack of belief and intention. In this sense, the dilemma we face is a spiritual crisis. What do we take to be true? Are we prepared to face that truth and act accordingly?

When Anne Baring speaks of Alchemy in Part Six of her book *The Dream of the Cosmos*,<sup>12</sup> she refers to the Seven Processes involved in the Alchemical Great Work. They are:

1. The rescue of the lost feminine aspect of spirit hidden within Nature and ourselves
2. The process of transformation involved in this rescue
3. The death of the old consciousness symbolised by the old king and queen
4. The formation of the new consciousness symbolised by the young king and queen
5. The formation of the Hermaphrodite – the union of the two transformed elements
6. The integration of body, soul and spirit
7. The union with what the alchemist called the *unus mundus*, the divine cosmic ground.

Perhaps we are already seeing the first three of these aspects taking place in our world, as the feminine rises and the old consciousness begins to fall apart. And then, perhaps, we can begin to see the coming of a new consciousness in which we see first the arising of the feminine and then the integration of the feminine and the masculine. This is aligned to the fourth, and fifth and sixth processes, for it seems to be closely aligned to my seeking an integration of the feminine and the masculine and, perhaps, an ungendered discourse, leading, indeed, to the arising of the soul, our inner being. Perhaps, unknowingly, and with faltering steps, I too have been on the alchemist's path seeking 'the divine cosmic ground', following in the footsteps of Nature.

Now that is a thought!

Do we need to create a space for our souls to expand into, to open their wings? Perhaps our evolutionary purpose is to learn

how to participate actively in Love, to receive and give love in such a way that the order and wellbeing of the Cosmos is supported and nourished. Perhaps the questions we should therefore ask of ourselves and of any enterprise in which we are involved are: am I loving, are we loving? Am I/are we giving and receiving love? Is our work guided by Love? And is it an expression of Love? Are we loving one another? And are we caring for our Mother Earth?

Even in Love, this can sometimes seem to be a lonely path.



I am writing this last reflection in the aftermath of COP26, the gathering that one young woman called ‘Blah, blah, blah’. And of course it is not what was promised but *what will be done* that will determine our futures, or in my case the futures of my children, my grandchildren and their children. I am struck in this by something that was a theme of Paper 1 – the limits of language. For it seems evident to me that the reason that politicians and business leaders find it difficult to respond to the problems of climate breakdown is that they do not have the words to do so. They are quite literally lost for words. So long as they continue to envision the problems in terms of the old and degraded language of separation and conflict, solutions will evade them. The problem is not a technical problem – for there are already new ways of capturing carbon, new fuels, including hydrogen, that reduce pollution, renewable energy is on the rise and there are new forms of farming and forestry ready to be adopted for use on a large scale. The problem is not about the *mechanics*, it is about *our perception*, the *language* we use to describe what we think we must do. So long as that language remains bound in old ways of thinking we are lost. We need to be able to imagine, express and put into action entirely new ways of being. And in this, time is not on our side. Urgently, we need to tackle this matter of perception and language, for unless we can *imagine* something different, and unless we can then say what this is in a robust and practical way, we will be lost.<sup>13</sup>



Words create boundaries and silence breaks them down. In a world full of words, this may seem inexplicable. But it is nonetheless true, and we will only find our way in the deep silence of the soul. We need to practice silence until it becomes a part of who we are, how we listen to one another and to the Earth, how we enter into discourse. Try this. Begin and end your meetings or important conversations with a period of silence. Step into the silence and wait for the guidance that will come to you. Try not to interrupt but listen and then before you speak take another moment of silence. To return to something I have said before, *Let's take Love seriously*. Let's free ourselves to imagine a world built upon principles of Love – in detail and with intent. For there is but Love and we are made of it, made for it, made by it. It is the universal and timeless condition, the way of the Cosmos.

# Endnotes

1. Anne Baring, *The Dream of the Cosmos: A Quest for the Soul*, Archive Publishing, 2020, Chapter 18.
2. Ibid. 457.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. 478.
5. Ibid. 459-460.
6. Ibid. 463.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. 465.
9. Ibid. 466.
10. Whitall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, Fons Vitae, 2000, p. 612.
11. *Mathnawi*, v. 2375 .
12. Op cit, Anne Baring, 2020.

13. One example of this is the genre of ‘ecopunk’ stories that explore possible, and sometimes fantastical, futures of a surviving humankind with entirely new relationships with each other, the living world and, indeed, the cosmos. Examples include: *Ecopunk: Speculative Tales and Radical Futures*, edited by Liz Grzyb and Cat Sparks, Ticonderoga Publications, 2017, *Survault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-speculation*, edited by Phoebe Wagner and Brontë Christopher Wieland, Upper Rubber Boot, 2017, *Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World*, edited by Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro and translated by Fabio Fernandes, World Weaver Press, 2018, *Solarpunk Summers* edited by Sarena Ulibarri, World Weaver Press, 2018, *Multispecies Cities: Solarpunk Urban Futures*, edited by Christopher Rupprecht, Deborah Cleland, Norie Tamura, Rajat Chaudhuri and Sarena Ulibarri, World Weaver Press, 2021, and *Solarpunk Winters* edited by Sarena Ulibarri, World Weaver Press, 2020.