

The Presence

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THE PRESENCE

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We form the magic circle,
We make the link and we tie the chain.
We will not let go.
Our right. Our power. Remember.

ΩX

Sisters and brothers, seekers of Truth and Justice, instruments of compassion and beauty who
walk the narrow and lonely path.

The road may be dark and rocky but you are not alone, together we are in spirit across lands and
time.

To you, God's children who live and have lived will live, praise be to you. Deep and everlasting
peace wherever you are.

Remember me, in the silent I dwell.

You are my dream made manifest, my love made flesh.
For your soul's fulfilment I will give my eternal loving heart,
You will rest in my golden bosom, bathed in light, forever.

PREFACE

Begin the Beginning

It is a thing of things, a thing of time and space, a thing of timelessness and change. It is a thing of knowing and a thing of free and all-present love. It is the Holy One and the many in the One. It is Earth's spirit and might; it is deep within, and without, far and high to infinity. It is here, right now. It is my God that is and constantly becomes - it is He, it is She, it is They, it is Us, it is I - it will not let me be until this work is made and his service fulfilled.

Awakening

It is true and right that not all of us should care about transcendence and obsessively seek God and spiritual enlightenment. It is our business to live on the earth and to be fully engaged with the business of living. This means our paths generally don't lead us on to sainthood and purity of being "in the eyes of God". Naturally, we all need to feel the integrity of our selfhood and find our own ways and paths through life. It is therefore not in my mind to press any opinions on the reader or practice any form of preaching. What I will do is question and challenge. Questions are like spaces unfurling in the one-dimensional surface of sureness, the dynamic force that can propel us onward. Seeking to ask the right questions and to answer them with all the tools that we have is critical, if we want to achieve real - that goes for everything. In a seemingly self-contradictory fashion I may do this by offering my own certainties - open-ended works-in-progress, for your own examination and questioning. It's important that ideas don't become fixed and solid, that they are considered both in subjective and objective contexts, in the present time and present space that one may find themselves in; that they are not the 'treasure', but the map leading to it. Hence, I offer you the fruit of the tree which is my own life, but to you it should be no more than a seed, if you should wish to sow it. The flowers and fruit that may grow on the tree of your life will be your own work, a unique process in its own right - a singular relationship with the divine, or simply a finer attunement with your deeper self.

Many times we are driven to opinions and ways of being that are not our own, but for some reason we choose to adopt them as if they were - this is where the cord that connects each of us to the deep reality of the universe (it is always a singular and unique relationship) gets entangled, where the river of life becomes murky and turbulent and the message drifts away with the current. It is obviously a question of will if one chooses to take this rocky path and also a matter of faith and endurance to stick to it, no one can be forced onto it, that's for sure.

Although faith in the Divine may be part of your life, religions and the following of their various doctrines, to my mind, don't go deep or far enough. Many times, institutional faith can even mislead and distort the reality of Spirit. The Presence is timeless, most crucially it is immanent and dwells in the very present where past and future converge into a moment of being. Albeit a universal Spirit, it is also uniquely embedded in our souls. Communing with it depends on inquiry, and deep and mysterious dialogue with the One. The 'fear of God' that many times is instilled in

religious doctrines - a lot of it rooted in human interpretation and social conformity rather than spiritual reality - is often a hindrance in establishing such oneness with the Spirit.

The book is divided into two parts: Part one is socially oriented and explores paths towards social transformation by way of personal transformation. Part two is of a spiritual orientation and explores ideas of spiritual realities - again through the lens of the Soul and one's personal work towards awakening. I wrote the book as it is presented to you, but if you wish to read Part Two before Part One, it makes no significant difference in terms of content and making sense of it all. What I would say is that it is a short but dense book, and the ideas in it do require some reflection if you want to make the most of it. Despite writing the book in a writer's solitude with no one to answer me back or question my ideas, my intention is not to promote solid ideas as much as it is to promote particular attitudes, which are in fact incredibly open to personal interpretation. This is really the whole point - personal transformation takes personal work, reflection, questioning and coming up with one's own answers. If this book acts as a mere trigger for all of that transformational work, even if you agree with none of my premises, I will be content.

On the spiritual dimension of this text, I am offering some conceptual stepping-stones - ways of framing the idea of the Divine in a way that is more congruent with its reality, as I see it; keys that may unlock hidden chambers of consciousness, doors and gateways into deep reality. If and when this reality manifests in your life this is where one needs to start building one's own conceptual scaffolds, as it is of a distinctly different quality to the reality we meet in the day-to-day, and one may find that their usual ideas fall short. It is important to recognize when we can start relying on the depth of our own truth in view of something highly complex and multi-faceted. One may need to find alternative ways of thinking and for framing situations and ideas. It takes a dynamic, imaginative and open-ended approach. There are no hard and fast rules as to how we should rearrange our internal cosmologies, and no certainties as to how life itself will continue to shed different light on our inner "planets" and "moons", casting shadows, revealing and reflecting, reconfiguring continuously our perception of these realities. All these things are indeed constellations on the move - what is certain and timeless is that the divine Self begins and ends with love; its love is always present and accessible if we choose to let go of what we think we know and who we think we are - if we are willing to "know" less and to be more.

On a social level, I want to urge and inspire you to act, selflessly and courageously, not by grand acts of martyrdom, but by small acts of resistance, small as these may be, in your immediate social and professional sphere. This journey of small but many steps taken by many is ultimately the only thing that will cause our defunct and diseased economic, social and political system to change from within and be reorganized in a much better and crucially, fairer way. Those in position of power I particularly encourage to act according to their conscience if they have it, good decisions and right actions taken by individuals in key position will make a big difference along the way. When we do eventually wake up to ourselves, we at the same time wake up to others, to the planet and the creatures around us, to the ever-present Self who we call God. We all wake up eventually; we are just in different places in the flowing river, which will inevitably reach the sea.¹ In

the dream event we all awoke at the same time, then not only the desire of a complete, fulfilled and sanctified human being would become reality, but also the dream of the ideal society, where compassion, beauty, truth and justice can flourish. But the river of time is real and the magic of timelessness is rare, so sadly, this dream is not likely to become reality, although it is not outside the realms of possibility. In any case, awakening is a remarkable and substantial thing even when it happens on a small scale; it creates ripples both in consciousness and in matter, and effects a positive change around us. This is true when even one person tunes into the frequency of One. The path, most important to remember, is not only a means to an end, but is the real dwelling place of meaning and truth. Many religions fail to point out that the Divine is not only present as an objective - as desired object and end point - but is present in its most dynamic divinity as *Process*. This is why living in truth matters.

Whether we choose spiritual enlightenment or unabashed materialism, the process of evolution is the river, and we are the fish. We can choose to delay awakening, we might pay by suffering or we may have the fortune of a fun-filled and carefree life. Whichever the case, the outcome of not being present and mindful of who we are and where we are, is that we forego life's most ineffable and precious treasures, and that the world is a poorer place for us not being truly and fully in it. It may be the order of events that the first steps that some of us take towards spiritual awakening are not particularly spiritual but practical and social steps. The spectrum of 'right' spans from heaven to earth, from the highest divinity, pure consciousness and abstraction, in ever-increasing materiality by degrees, to distinctly mundane and seemingly insignificant actions in this earthly life. The levels of reality, which we should be aware of and act upon are numerous. When we turn to right action and not only in words - and this means a measure of sacrifice and an element of risk - we will be met by the Divinity which has been waiting for the time of Its Justice. We are all under the divine gaze, I believe, although I can't say it is clear to me what such justice will look like. I fear that things are not looking good for us, and even worse if we fail to take radical action to change ourselves, and our societies. True justice, which I'm sure most of us hope and pray for, cannot be executed and delivered until we humans fulfil our part in the Story of God and Man - one cannot be without the other. It might take a long time but we need to start the ball rolling. It's really time to wake up.

PART I

Ground level

Nature is calling and we must return to her. She is not always ready to embrace and comfort, and her justice is not always evident, but her truth is the only one that harmonizes with who we are, no other truth can we ever dwell in and be whole.

Chapter 1

Horizon

I begin writing this chapter on January 5th, 2020 in Haifa, Israel, my place of birth and my intermittent home. In the meantime, as the work on the book progresses, I am at my permanent home in Wales. It is April and the pandemic is unravelling with many extreme implications, deep and potentially lasting.

Preface and chapter 1 I have left as I wrote them originally in pre-pandemic reality.

Possible Futures and Present Action

January 5th

New Year has been and gone. I tend to stay well away from the hype and celebrations. I feel it's overplayed. Then again, maybe it's not the hype but the commercial context, and maybe it's not the celebration of "just another day" but the fact that the other 364 days are under-celebrated. Why don't we celebrate every day? What happens if we don't treasure good things is that we either waste and spoil them, or that they fade away because we don't have the wisdom to cherish and protect them. Either way, gratitude and appreciation of the blessings we receive, individually and collectively is indispensable.

As we are living on the planet today, the present is casting a long shadow onto the future. We may be lucky now, but tomorrow is writing a new story to *all of us*, a distinctly different fortune. The present trajectory will be broken suddenly, and we will find ourselves without means to carry on as before. It seems that we need to have a plan if we want to avoid being left in midair without wings or propeller, and most crucially without direction or possibility to navigate. We cannot avert this predicament - the trajectory has been set right from the beginning and it won't start losing its advantage until it reaches its peak. Maybe the peak is being played out right now? That would be good, but somehow I don't think that evil has run out of steam just yet, or that blindness is soon to be lifted from the minds of many. Whatever this thing is that will unfold with greater intensity and force and with many dark and deadly implications in the next few years and decades, we can only predict its general outlines as they are pretty obvious already - Global climate and

environmental upheaval, disastrous consequences for life on earth; loss of socially binding moral anchors - destabilising societies, breeding war and strife, violence, fear, poverty, anger, isolation. There is also a lot to be optimistic about - we must be the most porous social entity that ever has been; the way we share information and art, and opinions and experiences can be transformative in many ways, good ones too, so a huge wave of positivity is a very doable thing, if the will is there. Going back to the problem, the root of all this unnecessary and utterly avoidable madness is the continuing and growing domination of the very many by the very, very few. Money, the most abstract instrument of power, is only an aspect of a whole constellation designed with domination and greed in mind - the objective of all-out power also includes and increases by the powers of surveillance, control and manipulation of all kinds of information; artificial intelligence and artificial life, genetic engineering and all the frightful rest. Of course, technology in itself is not evil, it's how and to what ends it is being used for that is the problem. It is ultimately there to control us, and it will be doing so more and more in the future, to the point that we are slaves to information technology, possibly even to robots. It's a terrifying thought. Aren't you seeing all this is coming? How many times have we watched this film and read this book? How come we just end up accepting this? Is this really the story you will leave to your children, to actually live in? It will happen if we let it, all we have to do is nothing.

Let us say you knew, not feared or suspected, but knew for certain that your children would be living in a world identical to Orwell's '1984'ⁱⁱ, if not in minute detail then definitely of the same miserable essence? Would that be a stake high enough for you to act on? What about your children's children? At what point on this descending family tree do you stop caring? Do you know, when you watch or hear the news and you see the victims of some horrible war or natural disaster? You don't know these people, but you do feel their pain, you want it to stop, you thank God you're not in their shoes, then you carry on living your life while the constant stream of bad news of pain and misery continues. Now, if you knew that there was something you could do for these people right now and it would change their situation immediately, like magic, you knew what this thing was and you could do it, you would pay no cost by doing it - you would do it right? Now think of the nature of time - does the fact that something has already been and that another thing will definitely be but will only happen tomorrow or next year, take away from their actuality when they do happen? Does it make them less intense or less real? It's real enough when you see a suffering child on the news, it's yesterday's, last year's, last century's news - does it make it less painful to watch? The future is much the same, the only difference is that it is yet to be documented so all you can do is imagine it and of course you don't want to imagine it because it is terrifying.

I go back to the certainty of knowing that the future world is an Orwellian one, we would agree that this is not something we would wish on our future brothers and sisters, let alone on our children. You can do something right now and it will change people's lives in the future - not a localized change to this or that particular person, but a total shift of paradigm, a totally different reality. Just because Orwell hasn't happened yet doesn't make it less real; it is as real as the poor child you watch on the news; they are far away, maybe they are even dead, but their pain and anguish is

real, it transcends time. When the future happens it will happen to someone as the present, it will be now as now is now, as my now as I am writing these words is your now as you are reading them. My point is this - the reality we find today is showing us the way ahead - until now maybe there was little we could do, maybe the parasitic weeds were still underground, but now that we can see them sprouting all over the place is the time to pull them out, preferably from the root. If we put this off, if we deny and procrastinate the time will soon come that we can no longer overcome the parasites, they will have taken over our whole existence. Of course, the "garden" as a whole, needs much more care and work than weeding, but the urgency is for clearing the space for new growth.

In that scenario where you would seek to stop the suffering of another at once, the thing that is standing between the healing action and its positive outcome is that there is no observable continuum between one reality and the other, they are, as much as we can tell, distant in time, space and circumstances. But look at this scenario where your action right now has a direct and undeniable impact on the lives of generations to come - what was the barrier of (the passage of) time is actually a gift here, because little actions now grow into big changes further down the line. It is not only the responsible thing to do, but also eminently sensible, if you care about your fellow human beings at all. These people will exist, it is certain, their future is in your hands *today*, will you do nothing?

You know, the optimism that we naturally have and kicks into play when we face a dire scenario originates in our deep understanding and faith in nature - 'deep' because we are not always conscious of it. The axiom of nature goes something along the lines that there is balance, order and intelligence at the very foundation of life, and that ultimately all things work towards a state of continuity and harmony, even wars end eventually. Why we as humans could until now still trust this axiom is that despite the evil and destruction some people bring about, most people still possess the conscience and the compassion that come along with being human - that act of single people refusing to do evil, or admonishing it when they see it means that true and extreme evil has mostly been mitigated by the people, evidently and sadly not always. ⁱⁱⁱ

What is different now is that the people, sheer bodies, needed by 'a malevolent power' in order to implement its control, be it physical or psychological domination, or administration of power, could now and increasingly more so in the future be done by machines. The simple human refusal to do evil will soon be no longer applicable. One evil engineer, one evil ruler, a few evil button-pushers - that is all they need. We won't have a chance to stop it when it does happen, because they will have made sure by then we have no escape routes. And contrary to the previous paragraph it is not one ruler or one engineer but a system that nurtures evil while calling it by other names, and the baton is passed through technological advancement, commerce, social manipulation and coercion, from one generation to the next, so the plan is worked out beyond one person's lifetime; that is where the roots grow deep into our garden, and our reality shifts gradually but very decidedly to another reality altogether, something quite unrecognizable to us. If you choose not to believe, it's understandable why, but remember that the chances are that you will condemn our

future sisters and brothers to live it for real, and they will have no power to stop it - only we do, now. This is really as dark as it gets, and great storytellers have drawn these scenarios in hair-raising and terrifying detail. You can say they were prophets, or maybe they are the inspiration for this inconceivable future.

So what happens now? This is a very gloomy outlook indeed.

The answer is always the same answer funny enough. We must weigh in the balance the truth and reality of our situation - collectively and individually, identify the problems and of course the solutions, see the right from the wrong, and follow the right path where we mitigate the problems and multiply and intensify the solutions. This is common sense. We don't need to believe in a God for this solution to be the only solution, but we do need to believe in humanity, and in our own power and agency as individuals.

Although we would certainly be rewarded by doing the right things we know intrinsically that there is a sacrifice and a danger associated with the path of Truth and Right, but we don't go so far as identifying it clearly, and so we fail to see the order of magnitude of the rewards that follow the sacrifice and danger. If we saw those rewards, if we knew what they were, we would be considered dumb to stay where we are.

The Power of Small Actions

The sooner each of us personally and many of us collectively, decide to take this transformative path, the quicker our humanity and as consequence, the planet can start healing. In practical terms there is nothing we can do to stop the calamities to come, they are coming. To what degree they manifest that is really the variable that depends on our work in the world. The most basic of practices go a long way - practice of compassion and honesty in our own lives, generosity of spirit and curiosity and openness of mind - so as to connect the ever-growing webs of the fellowship of human beings and keep humanity alive and fully operative, against the deadly soullessness of the system. This practice is indeed basic, but not easy, and definitely not sustainable on a personal level without doing the real hard work of awakening, truly, to ourselves and to the reality of The Spirit.

This is where reports from the other side of the 'great journey' become useful. Those who travelled the path inspire and guide, they ease the fear of the unknown by making it half known. The general outlines of the journey have been described mostly by mystics but also by artists, poets, psychiatrists. What is most clear is that the experience of the Divine is the same throughout time and culture. This is a key that should unlock any scepticism about the Oneness of God. The cultural landscape that surrounds each of those experiences, despite being populated with different figures - kings, prophets, judges and saints, as well as ordinary men and women we never heard or know of - the realization of God and God's love is one and the same. It always sets you free, it is always the most precious of gifts. It never fails to do this. Even when you have merely glimpsed, if not wholly attained, then all the worries that you had before setting off seem like what they were -

a childish resistance born of fear and blindness; a tired and complacent inertia sustained by dogma.

What are these dangers and sacrifices on the path of truth?

First and surprisingly the most frightening of all is our own shadow - before any substantial transformation occurs, we need to encounter it. It's a scary thing but ends up being very rewarding, not something that we should run away from, quite the contrary - it is through our own particular shadow that we travel towards the light - our own particular light, and the one light of the universal spirit. There can be no shortcuts on this journey; neither can it be a purely intellectual exercise.

The difficult choices and the work of transformation apply to both social transformation and personal transformation. The actual challenges in each are different but in principle they move along the same axes - the axis of fear and inertia driving us away from change; and the opposite intersecting axis of forward momentum and energy of the state we are fixed in (we need to stop this movement before we can jump off).

With social transformation there is the extra complication that there would need to be agreement, cooperation and coordination of many individuals, working as one towards the same goal. This is near impossible, unless change is being led and organized from positions of power. In contrast, when we talk about empowerment and liberation of the common man and woman, this is quite a diverse and unsynchronized affair. If this however happened on a grand scale over a short period of time, the system would become extremely destabilized. That's why the last thing the ruling classes would wish for is enlightenment of the masses - they are doing everything to stop it, and succeeding.

If such new consciousness did actually emerge, society could be reshaped into a novel order to reflect it, through a concerted effort of the social body as opposed to some rules being dictated by a ruling elite. This is a highly complex project and this is why it's best not to plan or wish for social revolutions in and of themselves, because after their storm is passed a vacuum is left where social order (rightful or wrongful) was and is soon filled by the least qualified to fill it - as always those who seek power but should be (for this reason precisely) the last in line to have it. The best approach to this perceived and in fairness practical difficulty is to concentrate (as an individual) on the right way, be consistent and courageous and where opportunity presents itself bring some other folk along to the same path. Like tributaries merging into a great river, in doing right we trust the process and the consciousness of that which is the universal order - right merges with right until what is a single wave of just action becomes a great wave of justice. Who can ever question small actions when the grandeur we see around us, all of it is based on the smallest of things interacting with one another?

When society changes from within, it is not by design but by necessity, not by force or governance but by the laws of nature and the reality of cause and effect. What remains the vital key is the individual's relationship with themselves, that is the ground for all other relationships that follow. If we can unlock that, we can start hoping for greater change in the world around us.

One ought to recognize this entrenched culture of consumerism and man-centred society, in which we constantly look at ourselves, examine, improve and reproduce ourselves, all the while totally forgetting who we really are, and most importantly what it is we are meant to do in this short life on earth. Or maybe we haven't forgotten really but we are escaping, because we hurt less in a state of forgetfulness, and if we remember and then discover that we are in fact rather small and powerless to change anything significant we hurt that much more? There are two parts to the answer: One is yes, it is exactly the thing we are escaping from, we will hurt more when we are fully awake; but the second part is no, we are not powerless, and we don't have to be small. The problem is that we don't get to realize the second part because the first one stops us before we even start. Fear is like that.

Chapter 2

The Social Order

Power

Power is always present, be it known or mostly as it is, hidden. It surrounds us in every direction and resides in us and outside of us on every level imaginable. Sometimes it is intrinsic and absolute; other times it's relative. At its most pernicious it's a human construct, based on some law of the Jungle. This construct is worked out throughout the social and state systems and in every relationship that we have.

The first intrinsic power rises from nature and reality and resides within a thing or a being, it can be mitigated by concerted will but it cannot be denied, neither can it be manufactured. The second emerges out of the relationships between things (and beings), each with particular amount (or quality) of power - producing effects and powers between things in different degrees of reciprocity - some things overpower others while other times there is a more balanced relationship. The third is conceived and produced by humanity and its various systems, this is power designed towards an end. It is a product of society and conversely society is its product - the one re-enforcing the other. This symbiosis means that the ills or the merits of one would transmit to the other. A fair society for instance would produce fair governance and leadership, and a hierarchical system based on merit; while an unfair society, depending on how and where it locates value and therefore power, would produce illegitimate power structures that work not to the benefit of society, but to the ends of maintaining its own powers, which in such case would be both its end and its reward. Similarly, if leadership was fair and governance just, it would produce a fair society in which good actions and intentions bring rewards and contentment whilst bad actions and intentions bring dishonour and disapproval.

It is clear when it is clear - we know it when the wrong people are in positions of power, instinctively by recognizing who they are and why they are where they are, but also practically (and this is the most crucial judgement because the first judgement might end up being wrong if by fluke the person is fit for purpose after all) when we see the effects of their power. Even though it is clearly wrong that these individuals should have the power that they do, there is little we can do about it because the system is designed to favour these people (who are pre-qualified by certain "advantages") over other people that would be much better suited for the job but have not been fortunate with the same kind of "pre-qualifications".

As we are entrenched in a system, being both the product and the producers, it seems impossible to change the dynamics, or the values, by which it operates - should we change the people in power? Or should we change society first in order to change the power structure? But how can one change be effective and complete without the other? And maybe the problem is not practical but in fact purely conceptual? Maybe it is the perennial case with us humans - it is never quite as practical as we choose to frame it, but is primarily conceptual. In that case which part of the concept are we getting wrong?

The things that we don't question become a ubiquitous backdrop, they are so constant that they become invisible, but they are not silent or insignificant, quite the contrary - maybe this is why we don't want to disturb them. We let them remain unquestioned. We don't want to disturb the flow of the familiar for fear of unleashing submerged powers, over which we may have little control. We are comfortable in our usual terrain even though we are compromised.

Perhaps surprisingly, we seem to regularly forget that this power that is at work within social structures is not inherent but produced, and can only be sustained by the consent of each of us. When another person has power over us just by being who they are^{iv} it is because we have ceded our own power and handed it over to them. Without our cooperation this power would decrease substantially, in most cases have no meaning at all. We should remember this because the way we give up power is largely unconscious and automatic - we don't even question it most of the time. Hence, it is of primary importance to consider the reality of our relationships with the people around us and within systems, consider who we are forced to be in these situations, how we diminish ourselves to allow others to grow big and powerful, who these people are and what in turn do we get from them? There is a trade-off that we need to be vigilantly aware of because the consequence of power in the wrong hands is always destructive and at times disastrous. Whether an act of resistance is against the law or just against the social consensus, if it rises out of truth and leads on to rightness and justice, it is worthwhile, at times it is crucial for the fate of many. The habit of obedience, acceptance and general blindness to the production of power needs to be broken within each of us, so that we question our place in the world in relation to each other continuously, because in truth and in the universe, what constitutes true power comes in the form of true things like intelligence, creativity, love and sheer spirit and energy. All of this is an open source that no money or power can buy.

With taking back power as individuals and with shedding the conceptual and socially constructed framework that keeps most of us subdued, we will be able to release much talent, vision and moral acuteness into our shared existence.

Systems

Wherever we look we see systems, every single thing a network of relationships. Every system depending on particular things that maintain it, each serving a function, a role to play in the bigger system of which it is part. There is not one thing in life that doesn't work in this way, even the smallest of things.

For the sake of elucidation of human systems in particular I want to make the distinction between the conditions on which the functioning of the system depends, and the functioning of the system in terms of its application and production. I will call it "fuel" and "function" respectively.

What are the essential conditions that need to be met? The more complex the system is the more conditions it will require.

Hence, human beings like other biological systems need to fulfil some basic requirements:

* We rely on inner mechanism (our biology) to be in good working order.

* We need a source of energy and other vital elements (food, air, water, light).

* We need a physical environment that provides us the above, plus safety and wellbeing.

Being more than mere biological systems of physical existence, we also need friendship, we need beauty, love and comfort, and most pointedly human - we need to know and understand things.

These are not required to our organism but are essential to our humanity nonetheless.

What we can see if we consider different sources of "fuel" is that although many can serve the basic needs, some produce better function than others. So healthy food for instance would not only keep you alive but also keep you healthier. A better designed home will not only give you shelter but will also provide you with comfort and joy. A well- functioning society will not only result in social order but also be characterised by peace and justice across the board. There is a pattern of basic needs and higher needs. Like the Maslow pyramid describes, the higher conditions (the non-physical ones) rely on the fulfilment of the basic conditions. However, this doesn't mean that the higher conditions are less essential to us as human beings than the basic ones. We will agree that human beings are nothing if not complex and fundamentally invested with the higher order of needs.

Social systems to a large extent impress on us our personalities - seeking to pour our free and fluid selves into readymade moulds of norms and restrictions, and mostly succeeding. As mentioned before regarding society and its power structures, it is a similar cyclical relationship and difficult to break or change the dynamics, but the first step as always is one of consciousness and of awareness. We should start by identifying the bold and the general, then move gradually to see the subtle and particular. First, realise that more than any other time in our history our "identities" are highly manufactured and profoundly fragmented. This awareness is a big step to take in earnest, not because it is a difficult concept but because none of us want to accept that we are anything but authentic and unique. But this is a baseless fear. Notwithstanding the programmed aspect of our being - we still are unique and even authentic in a funny and twisted way, regardless of the clothes we wear and the things we say, despite the moulds we are stuck in. In a beautiful and truly telling way of the universe and its laws, the moment one truly accepts their limitations / illusions / falseness is the same moment one discovers their freedom and authenticity.

The State

We can say that every powerful agent that is relentless will gain authority. The democratic state is at least at the mercy of its electorate, so if it has been practicing undue rulership, in theory it will be dethroned at the next election. But if the whole system operates on the poorer fuel and towards achieving only basic functions, then voting this way or the other will not make a huge difference in outcome - the system and what it produces will remain largely the same.

What will be a rich power source and what would constitute higher order of function? We will say for the sake of argument that the basic requirements have been met (evidently not the case when we see what poverty and degradation still exists even in western democracies, but we will have to put that to one side for now).

This would be my idea of a rightful and highly functional and beneficial society:

* Peace, beauty, freedom, friendship and fellowship, as much of it as possible.

* Justice to everyone equally, preferably no lawyers and no exchange of money involved. No one is above the law, and the law is based on truth or at the very least the desire for truth.

* The right people doing the jobs they are fit to do, and the wrong people are not put in charge of anything.

* A loving, reverential and creative relationship with the natural world, and a return to harmonious existence on our beloved Earth.

The conditions required for all these higher functions is brought about by wholesome perception, 'awakeness' and right action. We can learn how to appreciate the simple things in life (actually not simple at all), how to recognize the divine nature in everything and everyone around us and treat it as an extension of ourselves – be attentive and cooperate within what is already built as a harmonious system - it supplies us with everything we need and more, and that includes human ingenuity that produces many great things. This wholesomeness is all doable, but obviously something is stopping it from happening.

Indeed, our personal selves and our petty ways of thinking and being, our fears and anxieties, don't help the situation. But the way to conclude that the social system is a central culprit is to ask oneself this question: is my awakeness going to set me free from the tyranny of consumerism and capitalism and the arbitrary laws of the state? The answer would be a resounding no, because I am still stuck in a system that may not provide me the higher requirements but on which I depend for the basic ones - that means I need to play by its rules, as free spirited as I may feel myself to be. What if the whole of society awakened? The possibilities would start to look different, but of course it is not a probable scenario because the state would do everything to stop such awakening of the masses. In terms of how we look at humanity in general terms, we need to remember that the ills we tend to see in society are the effects of a small number of wicked, immensely selfish individuals - their actions big and small, and their many destructive implications. Unfortunately, society's ailments are also the result of close-mindedness, blindness and misconception by more than just a few of us. This is probably the more difficult problem, it plays to the advantage of those who seek to pacify or control us. When they have a powerful and potentially angry giant at their door, they will want to make sure that he or she, or they, stay asleep.

Destruction is so terrifyingly easy compared to creation. Surely we can see that the good in society (not necessarily State) far outweighs the bad. If this is not what you see at least you will acknowledge that things on the human stage could be much, much worse. We can also see the beauty of our planet and the wealth of resources (although quickly depleting) at our disposal to make our lives endlessly rich and fulfilling. The first observation should remind us that on the whole we are dealing with a benevolent human race, and the second observation should remind us that a benevolent spirit presides over the earth, and it is in within our gift to live a full and rich life in harmony with both earth and its spirit.

We are, as single people an individual system, within a social system, within a human, natural and universal system. The first system which is ourselves is the one through which we experience all the rest and it is vital to attune and refine it; the second social system we should focus on transforming so as to make it function at a higher order; and the third natural and universal system we should seek to understand and appreciate. These systems are meant to be in harmony with one another, as ultimately the universal system is embedded in everything; we need only to understand it, embrace it and follow its rules. It is not simple and it is an endless process, but this is the only way we can call the right way.

I must digress at this juncture to mention one of the most fascinating and informative books ever written, I recommend it to everyone who is interested in social systems and history, in philosophy and human behaviour. To my mind it is nothing short of visionary. It was written in 1975 by the eminent philosopher Michel Foucault and is called 'Discipline and Punish - The Birth of the Prison'. The title might be a bit misleading but not if you read 'prison' as a symbol for other things that we could regard as losses of liberty and the systemization and "normalization" of our societies and individual personalities. The ideas exposed in this book don't only apply to law-breakers but to all members of society, except those of course who are above the law. The book charts the history of state rulership and the process in which the wielding of power moved from brute power in the form of torture in and around the Middle ages, gradually into ever more subtle forms of control and coercion. A central aspect of the book talks about the idea behind the Panopticon (conceived by Jeremy Bentham in late 18th century England). It is a round shaped prison with a watchtower at the centre and the prison cells around it - from the watchtower any cell (or prisoner) can be watched, but as for the prisoner in the cell, they can't see whether they are being watched or not. The result is that the prisoner is controlled by the mere fear of being watched and so becomes their own watch guard, the actual watch guard is not even needed - the mere idea in the mind of the offender is powerful enough. Doesn't this sound familiar?

The more subtle ideas in Foucault's book examine the systemization of the spaces that we occupy - the cities, hospitals, class rooms - all designed in the form of a grid, in such a way that the subject can be watched, down long corridors and streets for instance, and order can be more readily executed. The last idea of the book that I would like to mention is probably the most subtle and to my mind the most pernicious. The idea is that in old style rulership much attention was bestowed on the ruler who was actively seeking to be objectified in this way. He or she was the object of people's knowledge. What we get in modern times, Foucault argues, is a reversal of this focus of knowledge. Now rulers are dressed in a shroud of secrecy, their personal lives are largely concealed from the public eye. What happens is a reversal of the objectified subject - now it is not the ruler but the citizen whose information is meticulously collected, through the education, the health and the justice system, and all other arms of the state. Now it is the citizen placed under the gaze of the state, no longer an unknown and anonymous subject, while the state machinations are barred from the subject's knowledge. Information translates into power. Foucault's analysis, looking

at the different ideas I have very briefly described here, is that all these systems - of control, of coercion and psychological manipulation, surveillance and the collection of information are designed with one objective in mind, which is to *normalize* individuals in such a way that society, or the state, works like a machine, without dissent, without malfunction or disturbance caused by the occasional non-conformist subject threatening its continuity. Against the background of all these systems any anomaly in behaviour, any breach of the norm by the single subject, will stand out, prompting the state and its agents (you and I) to pay close attention to that individual. If it poses real danger to the system the (dark and pessimistic but realistic) theory is that the state will find a way to stop them; but the more subtle and widespread reality is the lesson of the Panopticon - most of us so called subjects will be reluctant to step over the line that has been drawn for us from the word go; so we are trained to obey hierarchies more or less automatically while restricting our own freedoms as well as keeping our unique authentic selves, who depend on intrinsic freedom, under lock and key.

Maybe this has always been the case, but I don't think that ancient societies ever claimed themselves to be "free". We on the other hand claim a form of freedom while failing to recognize that we are caught in a tightly woven web. The only thing we are really "free" to do is to buy things. This is the ground and the enabler of all the evil that both State and the Corporate produce. They offer us things that we can own, so we forget that we don't own ourselves. They seduce and manipulate us, controlling us not directly but indirectly, as we learn to manage ourselves, believing that conformity is what a good society depends on, that these rules are a primary "fuel" and glue for society's functioning. Well, they are a primary fuel for the functioning of the present society, that is for sure. Now what we each have to ask ourselves is if we think that society's function is satisfactory and whether it is serving us who make it function by our obedience, or is it serving the very few at the top who make the rules as they go along, taking advantage of the rest of us, and themselves conform not even to the most basic principles of human morality, let alone obeying any rules or authority. If this is not criminal behaviour to the highest degree, I don't know what is.

To shine a light on this from a different angle - the conditions of our western democratic society today are in some ways exactly right for the emergence of a highly functional and benevolent society - first it depends on our will to do it. If we decide to, we could find the sources of poison and disease, or the faulty components; we could work to minimize, fix or uproot them altogether. But the first thing that is both most immediate and most doable is to address our own behaviour and examine how it is contributing to the system as we find it. We are personally invested in the system and this is why making the needed changes is very difficult - firstly, we need to identify them, which is tricky, because habit and norm are blinding obstructions, which conceal alternative possibilities. Then we need to apply these changes against a backdrop of conformity and social pressure to conform. Crucially, we need to take the risk of unfavourable consequences by pursuing novel paths, as we saw previously - the system (or our managers and peers in a more immediate frame of reference) will single us out and attempt to stop us in our tracks. Whether this is on a professional, or on a personal or social level - our status is at risk when we choose to rebel or to resist

norms. This is a lot to ask of anyone, especially if one has dependents. It is understandable why most people prefer to toe the line, keep the peace and carry on quietly with their safe lives. But let me go back to a point I made in the beginning which is that the safety you are experiencing today is short lived, so even if you toe the line now and it works for you in the short term, in the long term, your life, all of our lives will be torn asunder and the system that perpetuated them will not only diminish but grow in power while taking power away from us - with the excuse of social order and social wellbeing. This is evident now with the Covid outbreak - look how quickly the law moves to restrict our freedoms - yes, there is ostensibly a good reason for it, but on the other hand see how easily we give in to that reasoning and remember how easily we are manipulated. Next time, if we ever come out of this one, this kind of reasoning will be used more readily and potentially for no good reason. And see how happy are some arms of the law (normally men in uniform) to enforce and intimidate in the name of the law, according to their own "interpretations". Thankfully, there are some good folk in uniform as well. This situation of the state taking so many powers to itself and away from us is very dangerous. What we are going through now, is a moment of great political shift that if we don't resist in time, will engulf us.

The Geometry of Hierarchies

The very familiar shape that hierarchy presents us with is that of a pyramid, with the apex at the top descending onto a wide base at the bottom. In terms of people - a chain of command - one or few at the top, with ever-increasing numbers further down the chain, responsible for ever-increasing particular jobs and ever decreasing power - the apex has wide control and decision powers while the bottom has none - and a varying degrees of duties and powers for the folk in between. It is worth noting that the higher you go in this pyramid the more abstract your "power" becomes. So if we take a factory for instance, the people at the bottom would fulfil a highly practical and tangible function of making things. As we move up the managerial ladder, we see that the work that is done is one of organization and administration. Right at the top is the most abstract of functions, which is the production of ideas and leadership - setting the targets and leading the troops. The one in authority has the power of materializing their vision - what an amazing thing to have. If we consider by contrast the power of the one at the bottom - not only does he or she have no power to realize their vision, they will be reluctant to even have one. If we look at the way most organizations are run, the ones at the base are discouraged from having any independent ideas or thoughts regarding their work (or informal duties in the case of informal systems), because as mentioned before, it threatens cohesion and complicity within the group. Hence such employees or individuals who think above their post will soon lose that post. This is why bottom up revolutions need to happen en-masse, together this mass forms the foundation of any system and without it the system will collapse.

What we tend to see in the workplace occasionally is employees asking for better conditions and salaries. This would be a pretty straightforward demand, although not necessarily easy to achieve.

In any case, well-organized strikes that cost the company a lot of money seem to generally be quite effective. It is a different story though when we are dealing with more abstract, less tangible problems of ideas and ideologies, of relationships within society, of what constitutes fairness and justice to the body of society, or indeed in companies. This kind of ideas of fairness and justice initially emanate from the power of State and the principles it sets in law, but of course businesses and the different systems within state, society and market will embody not only practical ends, but by nature of being human, will also contain ethical and ideological elements, things that are not specified in law and as such cannot be enforced. As mentioned above, it is the human "apexes" of these various systems who are responsible for these abstract dimensions of the system's function. When these are conceived and conducted in fairness, there we have no problem. But if in any of these systems we identify a problem then what? Would the means by which we received better conditions and pay work for the end of achieving these somewhat nebulous demands? Can we imagine having a strike against the gentle abuse of power by line-managers? By the way that our thoughts, ideas, our very identities are undermined by our so-called superiors? By the rights that they assume because of their position - rights which they have no right to assume? What about the things we may be asked to do for our companies or groups of association? We may be expected to do things and follow ideas that go against our better judgement, as a matter of routine. How do we protest against things like that? All these things, which we do or simply turn a blind eye to, as regards to the conduct of state power, or workplace or town, village or neighbourhood, feed back into the system as a whole.

How do we get to influence the ideas and the ethics by which these systems are run when we ourselves are not in a position where we can be heard? For the reason that we are dealing here with more particular and intangible, many times subjective issues, the tool of en-masse resistance to the wielders of power is not appropriate. When the issue is one of ideas, what should ideally happen is a healthy dialogue. But where a healthy dialogue between the powerful and the less powerful is possible and effective, we know there is actually no real problem and the ideas emanating from the top are fair and drive towards fairness. Where the problem of corruption and abuse of power is present such dialogues by definition would be impossible. But let me qualify this statement - we are talking for the sake of elucidation about the deep inequality that is experienced at its extremes by the people at the very bottom of the pyramid, in relation to the very top, where potential inequality and corruption originate, whether embedded in the personalities of the people in leadership, or emerging out of poor ideologies. Our ultimate dream and vision is to fix the very top where injustice is produced, from the very bottom where it is mostly felt. Effectively, one of two things need to happen - either a change of persons at the top, or, the changing of the ideas, vision and direction of that same person. In the case of State we could vote for a new leader, although we would still be dealing with the ills of the system at large, and therefore effect little change. In the case of Companies the problem is diametrically inverse - we can't vote for a new director, but a new director when she or he come, do in fact have the power to change the working of the system, or in this case the ethical principles by which their company operates - a

power that the director of state doesn't have, because state is a slow-moving beast that resists profound changes, while business in this instance is smaller and more agile, more ready to move and change, it is also freer because of not being a democratic system answerable and dependent upon the "demos".

Following this line of thought we must agree that the way of changing the given system for the better is by way of changing ideas as opposed to replacing the people in charge, because as we see - in one case it doesn't have the desired effect (state) and in the other we have no say over the matter (companies). So how does one person, a few people or even many at the bottom, whose ideas are generally ignored by the system and even by their own peers, suddenly find a coherent and effective voice, a matching challenge to the ideas held right at the top? The answer is that there is no way such voices will be heard by those who don't want to listen. Are there other channels though, by which we can convey and effect a message of change? The answer is yes. Remember that the problem here is both intangible and systemic - so very difficult to objectively identify and outline on the first account, and very persistent because it is embedded in every aspect and level of the system. The solution then will be, in its nature, complementary to the problem - meaning, it will be systemic and gradual in its effect, it will be barely tangible until at last the system has largely transformed and its "production" is tangibly of a different quality. If we look again at the geometry of hierarchy, and imagine it in the third dimension as a pyramid - we can judge the structure to be solid as long as the bottom and the centre of it stay largely intact - a sudden disintegration of big chunks of the body or foundations of the pyramid will cause it to collapse. In human practical terms disintegration could mean either a cessation of work / production, or breakdown of the power structure - that invisible element that makes people do what they do. The breakdown of power structure would sometimes mean downing tools en masse (which as discussed previously is not an ideal tool in the case of ideological challenge) but can also be resistance against doing specific things, or at times insisting on doing things in a particular way that is different to the norm, because we believe it's a better way. This is where the solution, which I think is the only lasting solution becomes subtle; its effects accordingly are small to start with. Significantly the resistance is not directed from the very bottom to the very top but to that which is in direct contact with it. To further examine the pyramid illustration so as to include the people in between the top and the bottom - these I would argue have much power as they are in contact with the higher and the lower ranks, and of course sideways within their own rank, so their influence can reach out in many directions. Furthermore, they have some "power", or legitimacy - to have ideas, to challenge and improve on what they find. The actions that define individuals are cumulatively the same actions and attributes that define organizations and informal systems alike. Our capacity for ideas and for questioning wherever we find ourselves in the hierarchy, remains present whether we choose to use it or not, it may be dormant but it is not dead. The point is that we *should* be using it, to the best of our judgement where it can and does make a difference - most notably, even a small difference. An individual right action has a practical effect albeit a small one; it also has an inspirational effect, so if one individual sets out to act according to their

conscience despite the risk associated with any act of resistance as small as it may be, they are likely to inspire a few more people to do the same. If we started having faith in one another and that solidarity replaced the fear we had of our superiors, or the odd rogue, then we would be going down the right path. Goodness can be as infectious as wickedness and fear, but we all need to start by lighting our own little flames - over time they will converge to become a glorious fire. So for example, an exchange of ideas between peers can end up being very effective if followed through with seriousness and determination. If the communication of these ideas was deemed impossible between the apex and the bottom, it is not the case if we look at communicating these ideas (once they have been well-articulated) to our peers and line-managers. They might decide to communicate it to their peers or their superiors and so on; the idea may gain traction and momentum. Every system is made of people, unique individuals with different sets of qualities and ideas, we all make a difference when we choose to fill our boots with who we are as opposed to who we are told we should be - we are not robots, nor machines or slaves, but somehow we act in many ways as if we were. Because we are pacified and controlled we don't do what humans do best: challenge, question, resist injustice, produce and create new means and new ends. These liberties seem to be reserved only to those at the top, they give themselves these basic rights while denying them from us - and we let them; without resistance we comply, the good citizens that we are.

Intellectual Elites and the Economy of Truth

You may have noticed I have a passion for Truth. I always had this passion. It wasn't until relatively recently that the full ridiculousness of the post-modern paradigm and social reality that mirrors it became apparent to me. It was after I graduated and continued onto post-graduate studies in Fine Art. These were more or less the words that one of my lecturers directed at me: "You can't talk about truth, there is no truth." She was referring to a dissertation I wrote the year before, she was singing from the dogmatic hymnbook of contemporary art school, where authentic creativity, originality and hope go to die. I have been lucky for not being so young, and having established a process and intimacy with my work and an understanding of the kind of artist that I am; so I didn't suffer the first two "deaths", but hope unfortunately had a serious knock and has not fully recovered since.

This 'no truth' truth - well you can see, it is self-contradictory. It is nonsensical even if we didn't analyze it, which I won't - something so removed from reality doesn't deserve being written about. What I do want to extract from this observation is how the intellectual elites support and fuel the diseases of the age.

If you haven't been a student of Humanities and you live a pretty normal existence you would be right to assume that there is such a thing as truth and things like wrong and right. If you get a whiff of the discourse you will probably dismiss it as intellectual nonsense, and you'll be largely right to do so. And what these folk would say to you if you argued with them would not be based on life but on other people's opinions, and what they said and when they said it. They give it to you as a

closed discussion. You can only be a part of the discourse if you accept that first condition - no way are they going to accept your questioning of it, even if you made all the sense in the world. They are committed to it like a catholic is committed to the pope.

This begs the question, to my mind at least, of what kind of intellect this is. The answer is that it is the intellect of the capitalist, who would do, say and even think whatever the system tells them to; they want to succeed and they are willing to compromise along the way. Maybe they didn't have such strong opinions to start with, which made them more vulnerable to dogmatic brainwash, maybe they actually believe that $2+2=5$. In any case they pass the baton to following generations, from which the same type of people and thinking emerges.

This intellectual (sub) system is an active part of the capitalist system; these are not mere observers and commentators looking from the outside in. What this elite does in its active functioning is to supply the "mother" system with meaning and value - the "production of knowledge", but most critically a particular type of knowledge. It serves a duty that the intellectual elite always had, which is making the order of the day philosophically and morally legitimate. Although they may look as if they have just come out of a Woody Allen film, all thoughtful and fluffy, discussing French philosophy or whatever may be the fashion of the day, it doesn't make them guiltless or harmless. In whatever is happening right now they are complicit. Of course, we are all complicit to different extents just by participating, but those with some power are naturally more so than those with none, and the job of promoting ideas is undoubtedly a powerful position to be in. It is also important to note that this power can swiftly be redirected to better ends. It would be good if a different discourse could emerge within academia - one that is truly free of dogma. Maybe we could then start seeing knowledge reflecting truth again.

Academia and culture are the homes of the intellect where we go to be nurtured and transformed, inspired and informed. I am not sure how often we emerge satisfied that we were provided with the things we had asked for. In the meantime, words are written and written about, ideas get generated and multiplied with endless variations. The "absence" of truth means it is a free-for-all on the stage of ideas. This in itself isn't a bad thing; the problem arises when dissent is being silenced. Then the hypocrisy of the system reveals itself in truth. A deeply entrenched conformism, which only pretends to be an open field of ideas, is dominating the discourse while suppressing any new growth. It is not interested in novelty or actual transformation, which should be its primary "function"; the main thing it is interested in is its own self-preservation, much like the political elite, or the rich - much like any other elite we can think of.

Chapter 3

Words

There is a line in the bible that goes ... "He looks but he doesn't see"... or is it "He sees but he doesn't look"...? I can never remember which way it goes, because in both ways it has a meaning; and I can never be certain of what exactly it is trying to say although I think I essentially get it. Depending on subtly different ways of interpreting both words, "look" and "see" we can glean different meanings. For instance, we might say, "he looks but he doesn't see" and mean he tries but he fails to see (but why does he fail to see?). When we say he sees but he doesn't look we might mean he sees with his eyes, but he doesn't look in depth, he doesn't examine. Of course, there will be more ways to interpret this, depending on what values and subtle qualities we attach to the words that we use. The problem is not that we do it - the problem is that each of us does it in their own particular way, arriving at different understanding but coming to what seems to be an agreement with the rest of us, through saying this or another general axiom, agreeing ultimately on quite a generalized notion of what we mean - which in the above case is basically a statement about failure to do something in a wholesome and satisfactory way - what difference does it make which way around it goes? It is this generality and malleability of language, but also the more abstract pattern, or formulas, resembling mathematical equations that are so interesting and powerful. In itself this illustrates perfectly the deep complexity that human beings entered into with the invention / discovery of symbolic representation, both ethically and aesthetically, not to mention practically.

Why does this matter, or at least why am I talking about this?

The level and the outcome of conversations is a direct result of how we use language to represent ideas to ourselves and to others. Some ideas are of essential importance, if we get them essentially or even aesthetically and contextually wrong (using words) then we end up injuring truth and meaning, this entangles us in deep misconceptions and distortions of reality over time.

In terms of long held ideas and the sheer power of language to change society, to look just at one aspect - it took us thousands of years of faith in a deity with very little questioning of it, to arrive at a place today of much questioning and much less faith - in fact not only less faith, but an anti-faith faith. We have swung from one extreme to the other, in just over a hundred years (I count it from Nietzsche "assassination" of God). The discourse has been thickening and multiplying ever since, not least because there are so many more of us talking and writing. On the back of scientific and rational inquiry the types of stories that are being told and that we listen to have become more critical and defiant of old orders and previous stories. This is a good thing; it is at its best the ongoing search for truth. However, the way to respond to this type of challenge to our perceived realities is not passively but with an equal spirit of inquiry and counterchallenge. I suspect Nietzsche himself would be mortified if he thought people were not questioning his ideas.

The power of words, especially those put into stories is immense. These stories (not the overtly fictional but the "stories" about truth) based on particular experiences and trajectories, can't in themselves preclude other aspects of truth which they may fail to mention, and they are bound to

fail. Every so-called cosmology we encounter, is part of a larger cosmology, nothing includes everything except everything. In adopting or entering other people's stories of truth, we shouldn't forget everything that they didn't tell us about. Some things regarding truth are really for the experts to tell us laymen because we have no access to the answers - no tools, no methods, no understanding of the reality in question. Other things - thoughts and questions and ideas that we all have because we are human should be for all of us to challenge and examine.

As for metaphorical cosmologies within cosmologies, all circulating and interacting in a vast cosmos - our own minds, dreams and stories, our own truths at the very least, however messy or indiscernible we find them - should be the cosmos in which we place other thought "constellations". If we take someone else's cosmology (an expression of their cosmos) and put it in place of our own cosmos, that's not a good move - even when we are very charmed and drawn to some deep and enchanting accounts, we'll do well by using our own experiences and ideas as points of reference, and do it diligently; and so whatever constellation, whichever stars, planets or nebulae we allow in, we make sure that they fit into our own constellation; and it is about where to place them in relation to other things which are already there and which we believe are worth preserving (that is also something we must keep questioning until we reach inner certainty). What is objectively right or wrong is only relevant (if ever quite possible to pinpoint) when one's own mind and subjectivity is in order.

Every question can open a door into true discovery, this is why other people's stories have real value; however, it is only part of a much greater process, as there is nothing more vital than the discovery of the "knower" alongside what is there to be known. We all have at least a few "stories" about truth if we care to unravel our own thoughts and ideas, our experiences and our dreams. They matter greatly in our own journey - even if they are vague or incomplete. What they are is particular - particularly ours and relevant to us, not general or hypothetical but fully embedded in the context of our being. The solution is always hiding somewhere in the "problem", this is the reason for probing the immanent self rather than to solely seek solutions in generalized abstractions - as true and deep as these may be.

It seems to be the case that whenever we humans invent something to serve our particular needs, it arises as something ingenious, the result of both intelligence, creativity and power of application, but subsequently brings about both laziness and loss of some skills (those we had to use before the instrument came along). We ought to be very conscious of both the power and potential emptiness of words; and when empty words are combined with power (meaning people with power over others) they usually result in malevolent actions and consequences, in distortion of what is right.

This is only half of the problem with spoken language. The other problem which overlaps the first but also produces its own distinct offspring is more subtle and maybe more dangerous because of it. The automatic aspects of our being, in which symbolic representation plays a huge part - drive towards easy answers, to maintain perpetual states of consistent self-identity and solid perception of reality. The automatic function is pushed by the desire for conclusions, coherence and

conformism - all of these are a constant pull on our mental orientation. True answers for the big questions are highly complex and mostly full of ostensible contradictions. The answers for the big questions are difficult and full of more questions, they are not designed for preaching to others or proclaiming from the tops of mountains, because not only in their very substance there are exceptions and contradictions, but there is always the ongoing problem of language and how to give a non-ambiguous form to particular 'meanings' - that is to my mind one impossible task. This is why self-knowledge is the launch pad of all transcendental and experiential knowledge; one can have it but be unable to communicate it to others. What is important is to know that one does have it, even when one can't express it in words, and the less one is able to find words for it the more likely it is to be true.

We are built to seek comfort, not only physically but also morally, symbolically and linguistically, even when the result of this comfort-seeking is ultimately destructive. Hence, language ends up many times both misconceiving and misrepresenting. Hollow words and one-dimensional statements are like thick cloaks thrown on top of meticulously crafted objects, following their outlines but totally missing their internal dimensions, their colours and textures. This "cloak" of words can be a mantle of unintentional as well as intentional concealment of the subject in hand. The point to make is that language even as a cloak over meaninglessness and falseness still has the power of investing meaning in our perception of reality. So if we say or hear things often enough, even if they are false or empty, they will eventually translate into reality because language drives perception and perception facilitates new realities. These worlds that are created through language are the obvious consequence of our humanity, and we are human for and because of language. The Word stands like a symbolic flag at the starting point of our human endeavour. It is possible and even advisable to take a step back from spoken language. The world is full of forms, they all communicate something; we can become sensitive and attuned to non-verbal languages, other creatures do it. Maybe this is what is meant by the looking and not seeing, we need to apply more instruments, more sensibilities, more generosity and faith in the things that are least likely to shout and therefore are most likely to be reflections of truth. In practical terms of communication between people, we ought to apply great suspicion over the words that come out of our own mouths, let alone those of others. The natural and logical step is to be highly suspicious even of our own thoughts that come in the form of words. They get lodged in our minds, rightly or wrongly, by our own doing or by our peers, they go round and round, and the more we repeat them the more we believe them, even if they are decidedly wrong, and then they become a reality - that is, our actions seek to match and confirm our thoughts and beliefs.

Chapter 4

Practical Idealism

Idealism as an idea usually runs alongside the opposite idea of "reality". It doesn't do it by the nature of what it is - it does it because of language and culture, and a "reality" that insists on being the only reality in town. Any extreme idealism approaching a utopian nature is obviously discounted as daydreaming and wholly impracticable. These to a large extent are true enough assumptions, for the reason that while there is no limit on what can be dreamt, there is a limit to what can be done in physical reality. Nonetheless we find that the "short circuit" of language is holding back some very doable and realistic attempts to transform our reality today. The powers that be would label individuals with such ideas as pipe-dreamers and in such a way dismiss and belittle them. On the other side of the personality spectrum they will uphold the notion of the practical and rational man, grounded in reality, working towards achievable ends and presumably achieving them; not the kind of pipe-dreamer who gazes at clouds and wastes precious time writing poetry or singing songs about it. I am painting a caricature but you must admit that this is what the word idealism or idealist in this case conjures up. It stands in diametric opposition to realism and to pragmatism.

Well, it really doesn't have to, and in truth it doesn't. Reality is a fluid, changing and multi-layered thing with some things that are fixed - the laws of nature. Ideals exist in freedom and can adapt to reality in such a way that they are doable. In other words, reality can move towards Ideals and ideals can move towards reality, making it possible for them to meet in the middle. From that middle point where the two have converged into a new reality, what is realistically possible insofar as practicing idealism goes, should become clearer and clearer along the path towards the ideal. In the failure of enacting ideals, it is mostly the lack of will in positions of power to do so - it is rarely a question of reality "not allowing" it to happen.

The importance of ideals and following them, even if we achieve a fraction of what we have our sights on, is that it puts us on the right path. I should reiterate the significance of process. If we are moving towards a worthy goal, then the fact that we haven't got there yet takes nothing away from the integrity of our mission. And when we speak about enacting one's ideals in one's life, then even small steps that might look to another person negligible, are significant. Idealism, much like many other habits of mind is a type of muscle - the more we use it the stronger it gets. I believe it's a muscle that we may have neglected, maybe because the world seems resistant to it, and we end up feeling like idiots when our ideals run against the harsh reality that the capitalist situation generates, a dog eat dog world. If you are too soft you'll be eaten for breakfast by some fat pig, so we believe, and we'll be probably right to believe so - unless we work our ideals in the context of reality. This means that we don't try to implement the ideal in its full essence and implications if that is impracticable, but we focus our efforts in doing that which is practicable and makes sense. Trying to weigh up idealism against pragmatism I can't help thinking about Christ, the ultimate idealist. Although his core message is holy and true, other instructions are extreme. Some rare people set out to practice all of these instructions in earnest. I am sure that their efforts are

rewarded at least in terms of their own relationship to the divine. However, most people can see that some of these ideals can't be practiced without taking a serious toll on that person's life, sometimes even putting that life in danger. It is perfectly normal to seek self-preservation and on that account avoid certain behaviours like over-generosity to someone who should not be trusted, for instance. The world is full of people who would take advantage of our kindness - and this, the meek and the gentle learn very quickly. If they are actually not that meek they will carry on regardless, but if they are also sensible they will know when the kindness that they offer is not only wasted but is also demeaned and degraded and they will wisely avoid offering it in those cases. We each really need to weigh up all these things so they make sense to us.

In view of the system's function as well as thoughts of future social structures and methodologies, we should start broadening our horizons to different possibilities and alternative ways of living that are called for, as our reality is changing and demanding solutions. We ought to be very vigilant of words and how those are used to undermine ideas. The most corrupt individuals will stop at nothing and will use any instrument to fight their opponents, starting with the most available weapon which is words, and subsequent manipulation of mind and of perceived reality (to which we normally submit very quickly), that presents us with things that are either false or are carefully crafted to be discouraging and deflating. Our own faith in a better future should be unwavering, because it is possible, the only thing that is in our way is that the institutional will is not there. What we need to focus our efforts on is how we can practice what we believe in, and how we communicate and share it in our milieu. The whole process of finding solutions to things needs to become a second nature to us, an attitude of mind that many things are possible if the will is there; and if things that are crying out for radical and immediate solution like the collapse of our environmental order are being ignored by the decision makers, then we should carry on to take our own actions where we can. Generally speaking, if the ruling elite is worse than useless and we can do nothing to change it, the best thing we can do is ignore them and carry on regardless with what we believe is right and with people who are likeminded. In that way we keep things real and we keep our minds relatively free of propaganda, which is extremely insidious and destructive. It is human relationships that are the realest and most immediate thing to us, the most decisive element in how our lives take shape. The state and all its subsystems would love us to forget that and to emphasise the importance of national unity and general adherence to a set of rules, in this way we rely less on each other and more on the state - a tactic of divide and rule - isolated people are easier to control because they are both psychologically and socially weaker. This is one thing that we should not allow to happen, ever. The consequence of such a thing would be disastrous.

Chapter 5

From the Covid

Written on May 24th 2020, with much alarm, frustration and anger.

I find myself recognizing some of the bleak reality I was predicting in the very beginning of the book - this reality is happening now. I didn't think at the time it was as imminent as this I'll be honest.

We have been in lockdown since March 23, I am getting increasingly frustrated and very alarmed, not to mention angry. It goes without saying that the UK government has been absolutely useless in controlling this disease.

The pandemic response plan in 2016 produced recommendations. They were clear, and if these were followed as they should have been, we would - as a nation and individuals - be in a better place now, much better. After the State and its officials spent all this time and money carrying out a "research group" (obviously pointless), they were then meant to follow those recommendations, but they failed to do so. Not to mention years of underfunding of the NHS and social care that left it struggling as it was, even before the pandemic.

Now check this out - it was put on our conscience that if we don't follow the guidelines we are potentially responsible for killing people, personally! Of course, we all have a part to play in taking our personal share of the burden in tackling this disease, and of course we need to make some sacrifices in view of the risks and dangers. However, it is the way that Government have shifted the burden of responsibility and most importantly the burden of (notional) blame onto us, and on their part are taking no responsibility or even seem to feel accountable for their actions. I am confounded to be somewhat alone in my anger.

To sum up: Bad management and sheer incompetence on the part of top Government posts - little care and poor service for the people who keep this country going (that means more or less everyone) resulting in many unnecessary and tragic deaths (in most inhumane isolation and separation from loved ones on one's deathbed), loss of livelihood and most scary of all – loss of our most basic and natural freedoms. As if this was not enough then let us not forget the lack of accountability and remind ourselves again how they are shifting the responsibility on us instead of doing their jobs properly. You should be as angry as I am, why are you not?

This position of power that Government has is by our grace, so really we should be able to sack them if we felt that we had to, but we won't be able to do that for at least another four years. In normal times at least we could protest, but we can't do that freely either.

For us this is not a good place to be in. In five years time if things don't shift quickly back into some semblance of normality, this nation will be a poor and miserable one. The Tories will hand their mess over to Labour who will only have enough time to slightly fix it before they screw it up again in a slightly different way and hand it back to the Tories. Some damage can't be undone - the reason why it is even more so now than any other time, is because we don't have the luxury of time to screw up - even more than usual - while the earth's clock is ticking against us, already so violently.

This is difficult to say because it's a dark view indeed and at the moment only a fear, not a conviction. It is a fear that Governments that chose to take people's liberties away, doing it I would say, with a genuine sense of emergency, that some of them might develop a taste for taking people's powers and freedoms away from them. I am worried about what can happen here in the UK. It is within the realm of possibility, a place in reality we will have slowly arrived at because we did what we thought was "right to do" at the time, and according to state "guidance". If that dark scenario happened, it would be under the cloak of British politeness and good humour, it would look decidedly fair-minded, but the reality would become a socially ingrained state of alarm and obedience. Before we know it we could find our democracy is, in practice, something else entirely. Under the flag of national emergency and "rightness", somehow they will have managed to remould and redefine our compliance into (in everything but name) a subtle but most pernicious dictatorship, by coercion and manipulation of truth. But how could that possibly happen? Britain is civilised, open-minded, tolerant and free.

The answer is Fear. They create a national emergency, or stumble upon one as seems to have happened here. In the present scenario they panic (too late in the day, instead of planning in advance), they then by psychological means of evoking fear and using solidarity as a mechanism of control, ensure the nation's cohesion and obedience, and maintain the general notion of a functioning society. They continue to claim that they are implementing scientific advice - "The science", to again shirk responsibility and accountability for their actions. As long as the nation stays passive and largely supportive, well, they can just carry on making it up as they go along, of course always with the agenda of serving themselves first and foremost regardless. This is the basic recipe but this particular "pandemic recipe" also includes us staying both away and also physically distant from each other, constantly. This looks to me like an ideal condition for divide and rule. Have them both stuck together in blind conformity, yet separated by fear. Perfect. Add Brexit to it and the picture of an emerging ever so polite British fascist state is totally on the cards. Now we "subjects" have ceded our freedoms and powers and you, state leaders, hold the keys to our freedom in your hands. This must be quite a darkly dizzying and tempting proposition for people who love power and are in positions of power already, to be presented with, even if they are not entirely evil. But you ask what they would get out of it? Good question to which I don't have an answer except for the '1984' one - the sheer intoxication of power. In reality, this type of dark scenario as it unfolds in time is a process of gradual slide into hell, not an evil or highly intelligent master plan. This is why it seems farfetched now, but things have been known to move in unpredictable and nightmarish directions before. Germany before WWII was a thriving so called enlightened nation, what on earth happened there? People tumbled slowly without full consciousness into a deep dark hole.

In the 'social distancing' space there isn't simple emptiness but it is full - full of the State and its slogans and mind manipulation and outright orders, it is present all the time whatever we do now. Doesn't that terrify you as an idea? And doesn't it trouble you as an experience? And doesn't it alarm you that we see no end in sight to it? How long will we agree to this? Other than all the other

truly essential things that need to happen in life, we also have the most burning issue of climate change and environmental collapse we need to work on tirelessly to mitigate. We need to be in full operation mode^{vi}, not next week or month but right now.

I didn't even mention future generations paying the vast bill for all the money that the Government are spending now so generously, the same generation that will have to pick up all the other awful mess of everything. My heart goes out to them, not only their futures have been snatched away from them but now their present has also been hijacked - being locked away, robbed of their friendships of close proximity and laughter and joy, and being in love and planning and dreaming for their futures. They will never get this precious time back. None of us will.

"Stay alert" means be and stay afraid.

Dear Britons, you are too nice, and you really are, but also at times when you really shouldn't be. Don't be a sheep, this is no time to be sheep.

12/07/2020

Weeks are turning into months and the months will be turning into years. We look back to our homeport, we can see Freedom waving on the horizon, she's not waving goodbye, but is urging us to turn around before it is too late. It doesn't seem like we are paying attention. Drifting we are onto the approaching shores, a land of fear and subjugation. Though we are not drifting but are captives on the ship of nationhood, navigated by the most undeserving and deceitful captains. Of course when we dock at the new port (an unknown and incidental destination, for the ship's captains lack any form of coherent and clear plan) they will hail it as the newfound place of safety and wellbeing. One shouldn't expect them to mention the price that we have all had to pay for this "safety", lest we remember all that we have given up. We will remain blind with terror, with sheer intent to survive regardless of the cost; propelled by habit to accept authority of state leaders and trust them with our lives, God knows why.

The ship of life forever sails in the seas of the unknown. What we know of life are the fundamental elements, like what we know of the sea is that it is of water. We learn to swim, to sail, to dive, to drift. When the sea of life becomes a place of fear, when we lose our faith and knowledge in our abilities to navigate it, even the pirate ship will seem like a safe place. The pirates are counting on our weakness, on our will to survive regardless of the implications. They will "rescue" us and will make sure that we stay afraid, because as long as we are, we can be controlled.

As for the reasons for this abuse of power, let me suggest another one, much more mundane than the first one. Namely, highly convenient distraction! Just when the reality and necessity of immediate, actual and serious work in the world becomes inescapable – that of tackling environmental catastrophe, as well as dealing with global injustices and looming civil unrest as result of widening inequalities - a gift falls into their laps providing them with the perfect excuse to delay action, to restrict freedoms and divert attention, in short, to get away with not doing the work that they should be doing. Of course they are not going to miss this golden opportunity; to suck dry

and amplify every part of this situation for this end, and to magnify its importance so we forget all the other much more important things, while they carry on doing nothing.

On You

Slumber

Two months have passed since I wrote the previous chapter. In this time I wrote part II of this book and have been preparing and editing for the final publication.

In the meantime, it is fair to say that no fundamental shift in political or social reality has occurred, and what was a mere fear back then is steadily becoming a dark conviction – we are being driven over the edge of our democracy as we know it. The temporary loss of civil liberties and freedoms is likely to become permanent, unless we stir out of our slumber, remind ourselves what it is that we're losing, believe that the people in power are capable of sheer evil, and remind them that we want our freedom back as soon as possible. A simple statement of facts reminding them that our freedom was not a gift but is on a short-term loan, and that we will not rest until it is fully restored, something along the lines of: "Dear Mr. Johnson (for instance), you took my freedom away from me four months ago without my consent. When am I getting it back, and what's the plan, so I can have all of it back as soon as possible? In any case, don't get used to having all this extra power because I will not let you have it indefinitely and for no good reason, in fact I am taking it back right now, because it seem to me it was wrong for you to have it in the first place." This kind of sentiment expressed by a significant number of people will probably be sufficient, at this early stage, to ward off the rulers' dream of increasing domination. The longer they hold on to this power without constant scrutiny and challenge over why and how they are using it, the less likely they are to relinquish it; it is comparable to developing a highly addictive habit. Who can deny the intoxicating effect of power and the allure of even more power? They will think to themselves: "Well, if the public is not shouting about it, surely they can't be that bothered about it. Why should we just offer it (their freedom) back if they are not demanding it? Judging by their indifference, they probably never really deserved it in the first place..."

This is a highly probable outcome if this national slumber continues. Don't be fooled to believe in the rulers' intrinsic democratic sentiments and ingrained sensible nature of liberalism, or genuine respect or care for human rights and wellbeing that will act as a moral brake on this evil trajectory; they are corruptible human beings after all, and ones who love to wield power at that. People's capacity to lie to others goes hand in hand with their capacity to tell themselves the same delusional stories, if and when they want to convince themselves, as well as to convince us of course, of their own rightness and moral authority.

My alarm of the present state of affairs with view of the future is exacerbated, not simply by the way that government is behaving, because that in itself is not particularly surprising and also not enough to overturn generations of liberal democracy; what is most alarming and most dangerous at this stage is the sheer passivity of the nation. I am not in a position to talk about any nations other than the UK and Israel, but let me use these two as an example for what I mean:

In the UK, like in Israel, governments are doing everything they can to keep people in a state of fear. Both governments have assumed extra powers to themselves, while taking powers and freedoms away from their citizens, all this with the excuse/ reason of national public health emergency. It is easier to control people who are afraid, and it is easy enough to frighten them – so far governments have had the whole situation play into their hands without having to do much. In the UK what ensues is further manipulation of the facts (data over mortality for instance) as well as the constant reminders in public spaces, be it stickers on shop floors and pavements, loudspeakers announcements, and signs to keep our distance and follow the rules - lest we forget that going the “wrong” way or doing the “wrong” thing might end up killing someone. Seriously, have we really become total idiots overnight that we have to be constantly controlled and reminded, maneuvered and mapped out, alarmed and afraid?

I must be a very odd person indeed as I have yet to detect a similar reaction in other people. This heavy-handed means of control, of “space management” and restriction of movement taken by state and businesses alike is driving me to distraction. I have never been a supporter of the herd mentality in human beings, and have successfully avoided being a sheep, or being in situations that induce sheep-like behaviour. But now, this seems a daily and all-present reality. I may as well be a sheep, as I am not deemed capable, and by all means am discouraged from using my own judgment; I must blindly follow the “instructions”. Can anyone tell me who this genius is behind all of these instructions, that regardless of context and circumstances must be ingrained in every fibre of my being? And thanks to which – I, and all of us - have been rendered incapable of making common sense decisions in real time? It is a genius not of public health and wellbeing I can assure you of that, but of state control and the meticulous administration of fear, exactly where they want it to be, so they can keep us subdued and controlled.

It seems to me that my angry reaction to this multi-layered cultural atrocity is in the minority, does that mean that all of this is fine with the rest of you? You're happy being treated like idiots? You're happy being controlled and maneuvered (physically and psychologically) as if you had no mind of your own? As if the only sense of social responsibility depended on the state reminding you of it constantly? Seriously, people drive dangerous and potential killing machines every day - surely someone has decided they were responsible enough to be given that freedom. How is it so different to acting responsibly when it comes to doing your best to avoid catching or transmitting a virus?

Now, as opposed to what is happening in the UK in terms of social resistance to government policies (nothing!), in Israel there have been weeks of demonstrations and general condemnation of government handling of the whole thing, as well as a healthier and more irreverent attitude towards senseless guidelines and mindless interference in the lives of people; many people just do what they see as common sense. It is clear that thanks to the general chaos of the State and its elect (not least a highly corrupt and self-serving Prime Minister) and the inconsistent messages coming from leaders, as well as the devastating economic effects of government policies and

restrictive measures, the nation has totally lost trust in its government and therefore can no longer be controlled by them. They are well aware how their leaders are trying to use fear to control them, and they object and resist and call it out.

With all this chaos that is and is still to unfold, I am much more optimistic about the fate of Israel than I am about the fate of the UK, where being nice trumps everything else; and as long as the PM smiles and gestures kindly the public fall for it and carry on being nice and quiet. God forbid that anyone should threaten precious (and obviously highly fragile) solidarity by saying what they really think.

Here in the UK, I keep thinking to myself, what can I do to stop this loss of freedom from happening? Obviously, I myself have very little power. I admit I feel rather helpless, not only because of that and not only because of the abuse of power, which is in the wrong hands, but also because the victims of this abuse (you!) are entirely indifferent to what is happening – either because you don't see it, or you don't believe it to be so sinister, or you simply don't care about your freedom. I have never felt such despair, or such rage. I would shake each of you personally until you woke up if I could.

If a bunch of us could sack the whole of government tomorrow (wouldn't that be wonderful?) in the long run it would make no real difference because as long as people are asleep, they will be manipulated by those who seek to manipulate them. These people come in different names and with different hairstyles but they are of the same corrupt kind. The only lasting solution against societies being ruled by these types is a radical and lasting transformation of the social psyche. The moment that each of you can see beyond the façade and the game that these people play, is the moment when their power to manipulate and control evaporates. The moment your power of vision overrides their power of lies – marks the end of their rule - not just of these idiots but of every other idiot who should follow. If all this is obvious to you already, then that's great, but then my question to you is what are you doing about it? Are you resisting it in any way? Challenging conformism? Writing to your Member of Parliament? Speaking to your friends and colleagues? Do you at least give your close friend a hug when you see them, despite "guidelines"? If the answer to all of these is "no", then you are not awake, you are only dreaming that you are.

The real disease that should be cured is the pathological blindness and the self-induced passivity and "powerlessness" of the masses. And let me just remark in passing, in case it's not obvious, that the ruling elite is made up not only of statesmen and women, but of rich people who control them, and a highly powerful and invested media that acts as an agent for all the powers that be. It is sad but a true reality that nothing in our lives is ever free of propaganda, even our friends can be a mouthpiece to some stupid ideologies at times.

Being awake and watchful might sound like a heavy task, but it's not actually as difficult as it sounds, because it involves a new kind of energy and a healthy and energizing focus. Nor is it about being bitter and cynical about everything, because with all the darkness that becomes

apparent, there is also a lot of beauty and truth that shine with a new light and provide a most welcome hope.

The Unveiling

If it was only that easy to awaken from spiritual slumber.

In many mystical traditions, the experience of spiritual awakening - where the conscious personality becomes aware of the hidden depths of its being, beyond "ego consciousness" - is regarded as 'rebirth'. The twice born emerge out of conscious life in which all that was known was that which they met on the surface of things. The unveiling of the depths beneath the surface, which also includes the meeting of one's own depth and one's own shadow self - is a radical shift in consciousness that cannot be compared to any other life experience. If we agree that all that we experience is subject to perception then we must also acknowledge that if perception itself has gone through a major and fundamental transformation, the whole of life is then known and experienced through a different lens altogether. A shift in consciousness of this magnitude is rightly called a rebirth as it hails a new dawn in the life of that person, where nothing will ever be, or appear to be as it was before.

My own experience of this shift followed the sudden and tragic death of my eldest sister. It came as a bolt out of the blue when one morning in July 2000 I had a phone call from my dad telling me that Dafna had died. Later that day I was told that she had killed herself. To all of us this was a terrible shock, she had never spoken of taking her own life, had never been diagnosed with any sort of depression or mental illness, no warning sign whatsoever did we receive before this event. The way she chose to go was also emphatic – there could be no way she would survive after what she did.

I was living in The Netherlands at the time, and although I flew back to Israel the very next day, I missed her funeral. This might be part of the reason why I have never been quite able to have a sense of concrete closure on the whole thing – her life seems like a dream-bubble that burst so abruptly, by a death that seems just as unreal. I think that suicides always have this unreality about them, there is something of the hidden depth that reveals itself in the act but can never be explored; for this person had just said something profound, but then left the room to never return, or explain, or express that meaning of who they really were, a meaning that must have eluded us all along.

It was this shock of realizing that hidden side to my sister, which I never saw before, or ever suspected was there to discover, that shook me to the core and shattered my sense of reality. I was never an insensitive person or without intuition or depth of thought, yet somehow, it was obvious that I was blind and fooled by the appearances of things. I had never until then questioned those appearances. When people spoke and acted as they did, I simply accepted this as who they were. The same way I also regarded my own being in the world – my conscious self, my identity coupled with its ego, were who I was. It was the latter realization about my own blindness to my

deeper self- light and shadow - that was really the key for the radical shift, and the events and experiences and insights that followed.

We can never hope to lift the veil off the external world around us as long as the veil within our own minds and souls remains unchallenged. Unless we recognized that our so-called identities are a poor substitute for the true self – this light of the true self, by which vision of truth is made possible – remains hidden. As such, our blindness to our deeper selfhood it is an obstruction to clear perception of everything else.

If I could personally give each of you a key, it would be a key to your truest and deepest self. When you met that self within, your light and your shadow, you would then have the key to meet truth in everyone and everything around you. Then many things would be revealed to you - the machinations of life and of consciousness, a world of energy and vibrations, of profound harmonies and synchronicities, of complex and dynamic spaces within spaces, of the infinity of now, the timelessness of the present moment.

It would become obvious to you how nothing that meets our senses is without effect, or quality, or power. How and when power is used by others to manipulate and control; the extent to which falseness and blindness obstruct and distort reality, and how easy it is to know truth without even having to think about it. The reason why I would want to give every single one of you this key without delay, is because it would hail a new dawn to the whole of the human race and a whole bunch of people who dominate our societies today would lose their power instantly, their powers would disappear like the illusion that kept them in place for such a devastatingly long time. Tricksters have no power over nature, only power over our perception, once our perception is free and clear of obstructions, their emptiness and falsehood will be revealed in full spectrum, their power will dissolve and the game will finally be over.

I am not sure how anyone can willingly and consciously invite such event of awakening to occur in their lives - to what extent such profound spiritual and psychological processes can be subject to conscious volition, desire or actions. I suspect that it is usually events beyond our control that precipitate such a process of unveiling. It is possible that the apocalyptic scene unraveling before us today will be such a transformational event on a collective scale. It is definitely one good reason to be optimistic about the whole thing.

PART II THE PRESENCE

Chapter 7

Spirit and Evolution of Consciousness

It is at the discretion of light that anything is revealed to us.

From light to light is the soul's long journey that spans many lifetimes. The divine light wrapped up in its different forms, while the consciousness within it becomes shaped and articulated by its physical experiences. The original divine light exists in everything that lives, and in view of something approaching infinity assumes its timely forms - from man to a creature to plant. The primary intelligence that is inherent in everything is an all-penetrative consciousness, creative force and the sheer energy of life, and its process is one of gradual transformation and evolution. Consciousness and form are interdependent states of being, producing in their interaction the evolution of both. Forms and the world of forms are spirit and consciousness made manifest, they are the veil over the complex and unfathomable depths of reality. Seeing what is in front of us (the veil) is not enough. If what we seek is knowledge of truth, we need to learn to see beyond it.

As humans, our souls face a particular challenge. Our minds weave entire worlds and constellations as we move through our lives. The bodies we are given, the people and the landscapes that surround us, our religions and our cultures, our nations and the societies that we live in; our families, our dreams, our duties, our fears - these all furnish the chambers of our mind, and by consequence our perception of reality and the life of our souls.

The divine light is always present, within us and without. However, what happens to us humans as we grow older is that the connecting cord between the internal divine and the external divine gets blocked up by human concerns, preoccupations, illusions and misconceptions. Life gets in the way; this is how it's meant to be. Creativity and creation are conceived in freedom but born out of and into necessity. Restriction defines the freedom, which still exists within it - it is a type of leverage. Against that which challenges us or confronts us, we develop tools, we increase in awareness, we grow in creativity. We can do this when the spirit within us is strong and when we use it in wisdom. Alternatively, we are also in danger of giving in to fear, inaction and despair when the challenges that we face overwhelm us.

Without fail, by the time we have reached an age we are in possession of our own thoughts and are deemed able to make correct judgements we have already been programmed and conditioned to a large extent by all the circumstances and events and by the people and ideas and aesthetic experiences, which we have been exposed to. Although we think we possess all our own thoughts and are fully in charge of our actions, this is not quite the case. The reason why we are mostly unaware of it is because truth is a silent and subtle thing, while our identities are a constant pull on our inner compass. We always feel an inherent integrity in who we are - even if we

are wrong and even when we know we are wrong - whatever we do we tend to justify ourselves, to ourselves. The reason for this is because our selfhood always acts according to the original notion of the divine light, which is a true and perfect state of being. The fact that we may have - in actions and in thoughts and in awareness - moved away from this light doesn't change that basic premise. We all have the desire for self-fulfilment, self-definition and completeness in who and what we are. What we fail to see is that although we remain in touch with some aspect of deep selfhood (by constructing and sustaining a solid and coherent "identity"), it is an entangled and illusory substitute for the true and enlightened self.

It is when we get a glimpse of our most true and deep self that we begin to realize it is identical to the one Self of the divine, it is love. We begin to see the oneness and the One in everything; we experience the deeper meaning of compassion and humility. When one awakens, everything one perceives becomes a manifestation of the divine spirit. It is as if things were lit from within by the divine presence. Separation is reality only in form, but not in consciousness and spirit.

But how can anyone, from a state of trusting their own thoughts to be true, be able to identify them as illusions? How could we tell them apart from what is actually true in us? And whose truth is it anyway? We might feel that we need some solid point of reference, some objective and dependable thing that we can base our new convictions on, but this is where we normally go wrong - we look for "approval" of our own thoughts in the people around us, in the books that we read, in the films that we watch. Our ideas and thoughts and dreams as well as our personalities we compare to all of those around us. But this is the kind of distraction and divergence that gets us in trouble to begin with, so the way out needs to be altogether different.

The Way of Truth

We have to start with Truth; this is the most crucial thing - without it all the rest is a waste of time.

Truth is not a concept, but it is a type of presence. It is an attitude, a way of being.

In its most social aspects it is about being honest; in its most personal it is a source of healthy introspection as well as forgiveness and acceptance - of oneself as well as others.

Truth is the way, not a fixed object, because it is not about what we think it is, it is its own thing. One learns to appreciate it the more when one gets to see its depths and its richness. Not an objective thing as such, truth is rather a relationship between reality as it really is, and our perceptions, conceptions and actions in relation to it. We experience reality through the "prism" of the form we are in, and in the light of the environment we are in - this is where deep reality is refracted and becomes lost in translation. And this is why the most important work to do is to clear that "prism of form" and environmental "mind pollution" from interfering in our relationship with the Real. When this perception of reality (our minds) become more like a clear mirror, reflecting in sharp resolution the reality that shines upon it - that thing that is conveyed between subject (us) and object (reality) is Truth.

When the postmodernist argument rages for relative truths and against "absolute Truth" it creates a false dichotomy. There is a relational truth as described just now, which means that nothing really *means* anything independently of perception; but the deep reality, which is thus perceived (or alternatively remains hidden) is a fact - whether we understand it, acknowledge it, respect it, or not. This reality is made up of the most fundamental laws of the universe, and it carries on like a fractal in every direction and scale that this life manifests in. It is easy to find the absolute and fundamental in the ever-changing details, but one needs to learn to perceive clearly. The paradox is that one needs to be profoundly in tune with their deepest subjectivity in order to gain an insight into the most transcendent so-called objectivity. This is how the two lights, of the private self, and universal self, converge and become a relationship of truth. This is why Truth is the way - it is not a remote standalone goal on the horizon, but is a dynamic and present thing in everything we do and everything we are. It is not about what it is, but *how* it is. Being in it provides all the challenges and rewards of knowing, all the surprises and the gifts of love and of grace that we can imagine, and beyond.

So, what does this clearing of one's mind and perception actually entail? On a most rudimentary level it is a type of honest introspection and self-assessment. It is about looking around - past and present, considering the people and things, the landscapes and sounds and visions we have been surrounded by throughout our lives; it is acknowledging that much of who we are is a consequence of learned habits, behaviours and beliefs. It is about understanding that much of it comes as a result of conforming to social rules and cultural meanings. This searching introspection also clarifies that which is most true in us - the light and divine aspects of our being. The work of identifying these is somewhat different to the method we use in identifying the false and the illusory. Knowing the light is about being and feeling, it is about letting go of fear; it is about faith and humility. It is a 'state of heart' although it is also immanently reliant on the right state of mind.

It is worthwhile mentioning that some of us have been fortunate to grow up in nurturing and supportive environments from which we emerge with well-adjusted and positive outlook and self-esteem, but this is still not as full, and wholesome, and powerful as getting to know the deep self that even under such favourable conditions still remains somewhat dormant; and the shadow self (which must be acknowledged in this process of awakening) particularly when bathed in this positive light, remains even more unnoticed and unrecognized.

In this journey of introspection we come across some deeply unpleasant and frankly scary realizations, about ourselves and about those around us. We all have our own shadows to confront. Every journey of the Soul tells a wildly different story, but in essence they are the same. Our 'Self' in this transcendental world is the closest to itself that it has ever been and yet somehow our identity is at its most fluid and free - we are no longer worried about who and what we are because we dwell in the divine One. Life bursts open through its façade revealing incredible depths and mysteries, including ourselves.

This introspective and reflective work needs to acknowledge the deep things which are unique to oneself - the dreams that we have, the resentments and fears that define us, the things that we

love and enjoy and respect, our convictions and our talents, and the things that bring us to despair or anger and which we would fight with all our might.

What does it mean when one person's right is someone else's wrong? Who can be the judge of what and who is actually right? When we look into our own truths this question can become a personal, moral and spiritual conundrum. In the journey of the soul and in the seeking of truth, each of us, as difficult as it is, should try and take the role of a just arbitrator, see the situation from as many angles as possible. Everything that happens has happened for a reason - but we seldom know the true reasons for what we meet in reality, as it is in truth a chain of events in which the original cause is obscure. So when we come to decide between one man or woman's truth and another, including our own, we need to use all the instruments of awareness that we have. This includes reasoning as well as empathy. That's where Truth, if we attain a clear reflection of the Real, becomes parallel with the divine right and the divine light of love - this is where the Absolute enters the fleeting relative, it is the place of justice.

It is a crucial thing to note that although the journey of self-transformation and fulfilment of one's soul is indeed an epic one if taken in earnest and with great passion, it is also of value if taken as a way of dealing with life when it produces conflicts and obscurities. It still has the power to place one on the path of truth, even if this path might not lead to full on transcendental consciousness; it is still a hugely transformational force of the self and within society.

Enlightenment comes in different "atomic weights". In essence it is simply being in touch with the Real - it can be a fleeting moment, a lifetime, or anything in between. What is born out of these moments is an awareness that is and is felt as a pillar of strength and hope and wonderment - it really has the power to change everything around us.

The Body's Intelligence

I am not sure when it was that we decided as humans to limit our instruments of knowledge and understanding to a mere function of reasoning, i.e. our analytical brains. Not only do we locate intelligence solely as a function of 'brain-mind', but we go further and ignore the work of imagination and intuition, as lesser knowledge.

In truth, consciousness is a fluid thing and wherever we choose to focus our own consciousness and awareness, we will find it to be an object of reflection and as such, a source of knowledge.

This is also the case when we turn our focus and attention to our bodies. From head to toe our bodies are instruments, which read energy, vibrations and stimuli of many kinds - with important "junctions", widely known as chakras, which are centres of reception and transmission of energy.

When we are mindful and aware of these energies flowing in and out and around us, we can translate it into 'knowing'. It is a consciousness that is in its essence a sympathetic mode of knowledge. In this awareness we are able to experience deep empathy and oneness, as we physically, emotionally and mentally connect to nature and the cosmos. The boundaries we construct through our analytical minds fall away and allow a direct relationship with the world

around us. This focus and sensitivity to what our bodies receive and generate is hugely overlooked and undervalued.

If there is a part of us that is incredibly crucial in our being human to the fullest and deepest sense, it is our hearts. We all know this cliché- 'follow your heart'. We are told this when we come to junctures in our lives where we are at a loss and don't know what to do; but it is not so simple to follow our hearts when first, we have minds that tend to overpower the gentle language of the heart, and secondly, when we are not trained in the inner mechanism of the heart's intelligence. It is tricky if we only turn to our hearts at times of difficulty. It is like learning a foreign language only when we go to that foreign country to practice it, or when we only call our friends when we need something from them. It is in the first case a poor way to learn a language, and in the second case an unwholesome and selfish attitude towards relationships. Ideally, the type of relationship and the mode of communication we should establish with our hearts is one of attention, sensitivity and constancy. Our heart's intelligence is not only designed to deal with problems, or at times we are stuck and lost - it should constantly be awake and engaged. The benefit of centering our consciousness in and around our hearts, is that we can approach closer to truth, and that the work of transformation and of becoming, or returning, to who we are, is thus made possible. No thoughts or concepts can substitute this mode of being. Most importantly, knowing one's heart is about being present and being open - this is why it should never be framed intellectually, or reduced to words that never do it justice. It is in fact these "intellectual fortresses" that imprison us in the first place, and the work is of breaking through beyond the linguistic mind.

It is fear that normally stops us from dwelling in the 'caves of our hearts'. We know instinctively that we will find truth there, and truth can be a scary thing. We train ourselves to be nice and sociable and follow social rules, and this is where being truthful might become a potentially subversive act. However, this fear, although understandable and valid, also does what fear normally does - it is paralyzing and blinding - it obscures all the positives while highlighting all the negatives.

When we decide to enter our lives in the fullness of our being and explore our depth, as well as the depth of reality, we need to implement a series of methods and safety valves, as well as adopt some concepts that can help us along the way, until the immanent reality of these become self-evident - then we can begin to trust our own understanding, our own intelligence and intuition. For instance, we might be suppressing a whole lot of anger and resentment, for one reason or another. This resentment, when we start unravelling our deeper selves, albeit subjective, can overflow us by the smallest of triggers, and be directed at anything or anyone that happens to be there. This is normally where our trained brains pull out all the stops and prevent us from self-destructing, or unduly hurting and offending those around us. This is where instincts and emotions are subdued. We can really appreciate this work that our brains do for us - without it we'd be probably no different to wild creatures. The problem is that indeed, these feelings and instincts get suppressed; at times, we suppress them so much we can't even consciously acknowledge them. It is a safety mechanism therefore, that tells us to carry on as we do and not to introduce new ingredients into the mix of our psyche, because it might be a potentially explosive recipe.

So how do we go about introducing new ways of being without the risk of destroying our lives or spoiling relationships? It is never really risk-free to embrace truth. Explosive moments I think, are pretty unavoidable. But as we live and reflect and forgive and repent, the picture becomes clearer; and the price we may have paid when all the demons one by one were exposed and confronted in the light of day seems worthwhile, because we have made the dwelling place of our minds and souls a place of light. What was in the darkness of fear and shame and guilt, no longer lurks there and it frees us to be in the fullness of who we are. In this process of shedding light into dark corners, what we must hold on to and keep as a beacon, and as presence, is transcendent love. The divine presence is never far from us when we are on the path of truth – we only have to reach out in love and we will be embraced by it. The difficult thing is not to receive God's forgiveness, but to be able to forgive ourselves - when we make mistakes and when we seem so far from the perfection and goodness that we desire.

In any case, for most of us, our previous lifelong training of 'good behaviour' is not likely to be overwhelmed by the new instrument of truth, which in this case is our hearts. Most of the time the discomfort we feel when our minds and hearts are at odds, would be internalized and as such, will allow us the space and time for reflection. This will help us to deal with similar situations in the future. We will gradually learn to be an integrated and much improved self.

In terms of how to go about listening to our hearts and our bodies as a whole, it is simple, all we need to do is to take a deep breath and turn our attention to it. The difficult part is to be able to achieve a quiet mind and a mode of clear reflection - the rest just happens on its own. The more often we turn this awareness on, the more our body itself will become sensitive and awake, it will eventually learn to wake up on its own, without us having to remind it. It will remind us of all the things we keep forgetting about. Its intelligence is truly transformative, but don't expect to be able to share it or explain it - it's a very subtle thing.

In view of emerging new consciousness that may follow this reconfiguring of our sources of intelligence and knowledge - the risk of such 'new consciousness' taking over our control system, or engulfing our sanity, is by and large pretty slim. It is usually associated with intense mystical and spiritual experience, where reality really does unravel to the extreme, and so does one's perception and consequent actions, which would initially be in total turmoil. There is a thin line separating such mystical experiences - their bewildering and somewhat maddening effects - and actual madness, which is the result of being unable to integrate the "madness" of this newly unearthed reality, with the mundane and "normal" aspects of life. If such loss of sanity is threatening to happen then one should follow methods and ways to ground oneself, perhaps seek a good and open-minded friend to talk to, or consult written accounts of similar experiences. What one must remember is that although this deep reality seems to reconfigure normal reality, it doesn't mean that the latter should be replaced with the former, or that day-to-day reason and analysis has become irrelevant or should be done away with.

The One Godhead and the Cooperative 'Godhood'

It is perfectly reasonable for people to ask themselves where is God in times of suffering and distress, why does he not interfere? Why does he not help the innocent, protect the weak, make his justice manifest? After all he is meant to be almighty - if he is not almighty then surely he is no God at all.

It is a fair question in the challenge over the moral authority and the existence of a benevolent Divinity - the reality of pain and suffering and pure evil cannot be ignored and needs to be explained. However, when we criticize anything we do it on the basis of some assumptions, so it's not enough to question the outcomes, we must also question our assumptions and expectations. Pain born out of nature is one thing, while suffering born out of evil is another. Pain seems to be inevitable in nature if one is a sentient being - I suppose it is there originally to protect us. But Evil is born of Man, and the spirit of deceit, betrayal, cruelty and greed is of a different order and magnitude altogether to the failings and the pains of nature and its creatures. Nature is innocent; Man is anything but.

God in truth is not separated from its creation, but is totally embedded in it - when we suffer the pain of injustice and difficult trials, it is the God within us, who is the same God that is around us, who suffers - it is not oblivious. Conversely, when moments in our lives present us with a choice between good and evil, it is the same transcendent One, the God within us, that we want to choose over the so-called devil, which also exists in us. This is where it is not the absence of God as much as it is our choice to do evil instead of good - it is entirely in our hands.

Ponder this - would you like a God that constantly interfered in our business, stopped us whenever we were "wrong"? We would be like children who were never allowed to leave home, constantly under the gaze and authority of our parents, we would never taste freedom or experience the excitement of being alive, with all the risk and the pain, as well as the joy and creativity it entails. The creative process is never a smooth one, the work of perfecting is an endless one and it is a dialectic one - between trying, failing and trying again, and slowly getting it right, but never perfect, and so it goes on. The One has given us all the tools to make its will manifest in this world, but we choose not to use them. It has surrounded us with beauty and inspiration to do good, and all the resources to live a loving and meaningful life, but we choose to ignore it. It has sent us prophets, saints and artists to give us guidance and inspiration, but we choose to fill our heads with nonsense instead. We are the ones who hold the earthly key for our paradise; we can't blame the Divinity for our own weaknesses and inadequacies.

The collective nature of 'Godhood' doesn't replace, nor can it redefine the singularity of the Godhead. The One is a Mighty one and we should not lose faith or underestimate its power to intervene in our business when the time comes. God by now must have had enough of our criminalities on this earth. The earth is telling us this if nothing else did, but in fact that too, meaning everything, is telling us the same thing. It is not a happy God who is coming. We are not in a place to argue with Its justice, as it is the eternal One and True Presence. If we wanted to do something right at this point, approaching what appears to be the long awaited and dreaded "Judgment

Day", we would need to start pulling our weight personally, but also as a cooperative 'Godhood', and start living and acting and thinking in line with The Spirit's truth - that relationship that I have already spoken about, as opposed to a religiously constructed dogma. We should accept that there will need to be destruction before there is new creation, we can choose to see it as a type of punishment or anger, but we can also see it as an opportunity.

Collaboration can be a collective effort and if true solidarity is present one can ask for no more, but it is important to see how some forms of solidarity are manufactured by dogma and fear, to serve the agendas of others, those in positions of power. This type of solidified inert conformity should never be mistaken for true solidarity and should not happen if we want to succeed in our human endeavours. Dogma undermines truth always, and blind cohesion and conformity obstruct creativity, which depends on freedom. And it is in the variety and particularity and in the talents and the gifts of the many people that we are, that good things can really start to happen.

We'll do well to start reclaiming our humanity as part of nature. Re-direct technology to good and important ends while liberating ourselves from its control and interference - use it wisely rather than let it use us. Appreciate nature again, return to the innocence of your Child, embrace honesty and being honest along with all the little conflicts that it brings, because in the bigger picture it is a small price to pay for something much truer and better that is the harmony of being in Truth. This is not harmony that breeds inaction or placidity, but one that embraces movement and change and creativity, one that is submerged in the reality of acceptance and love and beauty and imagination.

We are still animals, remember, with all the potential of fine-tuning our instincts and senses, which we notice in other less "civilised" animals. We can return to our deeper intelligences which have nothing to do with intellect but emerge out of feeling, empathy, and being fully present and in tune with what the physical and spiritual senses are telling us. We don't need to start explaining everything to ourselves in words; we never get it quite right anyway.

We will need all these tools against the tyranny that might come and a lot of it that is already present - of dehumanizing technology, of ever-increasing interference and encroachment on our lives and minds. We are brainwashed continually by news and entertainment, and ultimately are captives of man-produced realities. We forget how to be in the present, we forget how to feel and appreciate the rhythm of time, the rhythm of the natural world around us and of each other.

This way of life we knew until now is quickly coming to an end, it might take 2, 5, 10 years. It is coming I fear with great force. I hope we still have time to do something positively transformative. There is really no time to be idle and complacent, most importantly this is not the time to shirk responsibility of acting for the greater cause of Justice and for what is right. The consequences of our inaction today would be beyond disastrous for the generations to come, they will be living in nothing short of a living hell if we don't act now. We could stop it or at least divert it right now, because we still have the power to do it. We are facing a bad scenario but as long as we can hold on to our humanity and our freedoms, we will, with very considerable effort, be able to make living

worthwhile in the future. This would not be the case if we were slaves caught up in the same dire scenario.

The Mythological Father

A common misconception, or challenge against the existence of a God, that circulates amongst sceptics and doubters, is a fairly reasonable argument, although it also lacks in reflection and depth of inquiry. This claims that the divine reality is a fantasy, based on the following presumptions - who in their right minds would believe in a bearded old granddad who sits on a cloud, controlling and directing, judging and admonishing, blessing and punishing, searching our souls, creating and destroying according to his whims, and to all intents and purposes is doing a bad job of it, as we see the terrible injustices we already spoke of? An almighty king who created the heaven and the earth with his pure will - according to our western story in no more than 6 days! All this mythology, all these farfetched stories, all the miracles that counter every law of nature that we know - how on earth can reasonable logical beings believe in such a fairytale?

It is true, mythologies are types of fairytales. They are constructed in this way for more than one reason. Most naturally it is about bringing in the element of magic into the story of One and the Universe, because it is indeed a truly magical thing.

There is also a deep mystery that a human mind can hardly fathom, and even if they could, they would be hard-pressed to explain it. Hence, the essence of the cosmic transcendental truth that these mystics can glean is recreated in a form of a story, or allegory, in which symbols and archetypes are used so as to produce particular meanings, but which are not meant to be taken literally. It is such archetypes as the Heavenly Father that are only an aspect of the Transcendent - the aspects that are most pertinent to our lives on this earth. God is consciousness poured into form and that also includes mental forms, i.e. archetypes. The archetype is not the thing in itself, it is only a way of framing particular ideas, ideals and qualities. God in truth is in everything, but as we attempt to visualize it or give it a personality, which is natural if we want to have a personal relationship with it, we naturally turn to the most obvious archetypes that embody power, moral authority and benevolence - for some religions it is the Heavenly Father and to others it is the Sun, to name just a couple.

Revelation and Grace

What makes a spiritual journey a truly transcendental one is The Spirit making itself known to us. When we talk about spiritual transformation we are not talking about mere psychological healing or intellectual development, but a space of revelation and grace. In this space we are in a relationship with the Divine, and it is an active and living part of it, not an idea or a desire, but an immanent force and a source of knowledge and love - it is a benevolent presence. This relationship, which is an ongoing conversation, can't happen without establishing forms of communication. It is incumbent on us to learn God's language, as God already has no trouble in understanding us - it is us who have to catch up. When we do catch up, we find that The Spirit has never stopped speaking to us only that we had stopped listening.

We stopped taking council of our own hearts. We stopped hearing what the birds are saying, how the trees are praying. We don't pay attention to the wind, or gaze at the undulating water, or look at the clouds. We are not aware that the transcendent One may manifest in any of them, at that very moment when we do look and listen. That's what the One does, if it is its will. You turn your eyes to the clouds looking for God and suddenly they morph into something that is meaningful to you, even to your own perceived "form" of Divinity. If you choose not to undermine your own faith and belief by doubting The Presence and by fearing you are going insane, then you will find that the more you do it the more you find confirmation for this reality. This is why innocence is so important and why children seem to have a natural relationship with God, or at least are open to the transcendent reality. They receive the communication of the Spirit without doing the job of analysing and interpreting it; it reaches their souls directly. But as we know, we soon grow older and start analyzing and questioning, not to mention the aforementioned brainwash that really throws everything into a dense almost impenetrable mixture of meanings, illusions and more questions.

Synchronicity

A punctuated and potentially bewildering form of divine communication comes in the way of synchronicity. Those strange coincidences that stop us in our tracks and make us question the nature of reality, make us feel as if someone or something is watching and directing our lives. If we are not spiritually oriented we shrug them off as indeed pure coincidences. When these "coincidences" happen it is telling us we are in some way in tune and on a path of transformation, we usually encounter these moments at times when we need guidance or reassurance. What they say to us, based on my experience, is not how to solve these queries, but simply that we are playing a part in a bigger story and that we are not alone, the One is watching us and where it can the One will guide us, but most importantly, it urges us to stay in tune.

Much sensitivity is needed if we are to start re-establishing these channels of communication with the Spirit-filled natural world around us. It is a conversation in which we must learn to trust that imagination and the reality of Spirit do indeed overlap. The Transcendent can reach us from the world of consciousness and dreams and nature, even from the most mundane aspects of life - in truth these all interweave and are as real as each other. We are invited to partake in this larger, deeper and unbounded consciousness when we enter this relationship.

If you never watched the film 'The Never-Ending Story', the original version from 1984, this is the place to urge you to watch it. It is a children's film but it is deep and beautiful and true. Its moral to us is that dream and imagination are integral to the reality, not only of the spirit but also in a very real way, to the reality of life.

Beauty

There is profound symbiosis between our conceptual sense of reality and aesthetic experience. The living world, before any human thought seeks to analyse it, is an aesthetic experience. To my mind in a cosmic sense, in terms of primordial consciousness and the abstract blueprint of life, it precedes

reasoning and morality, but is still a foundation that is embedded in both. What we see and hear and touch is directly connected to our own interior cosmic order and deep Self. Beauty and harmony are languages deeper than any symbolic representation or conceptual interpretation we wish to subjectively bestow on the world. Our minds are fundamentally reflective, and what we are exposed to in terms of our senses has a direct and unmitigated impact on our interior spaces of mind and soul.

This reality of aesthetic experience in truth can't be moulded and re-shaped by concept - if we don't experience harmony and delight through the intelligence and nature of our senses, it is a gap that no philosophy or conceptual framework can fill. Beauty is the physical manifestation of the Transcendent Love that is the beating heart of this universe and most particularly of our planet, which is so intricate and complex, yet by and large functions as a harmonious system full of beauty. It seems that only humans are an affront to this cosmic order, by creating ugliness and ignoring the beautiful; but on the other hand, when we appreciate beauty, it is a deeper appreciation than any other creature, as far as we can tell. Beauty inspires and harmony informs us as to the universal order. Our hearts and minds when we experience beauty become a mirror - and in their projection reinvest it in the world. The process of reflection is a continuum and is a highly sensitive instrument in the cycle of consciousness and of manifestation.

When we seek to experience, and know, and create beauty, we are doing some of the most important work we could do. It is not a superficial thing, neither is it a luxury - it is in truth a most essential thing.

Mental Shapes

Our thoughts produce mental shapes - these are real forms but imperceptible to the senses because they exist on a sub-material plane. These forms if they were reproduced in physical reality would be multi-sensory - i.e. they would have shapes, colours and textures; they would have a flavour, a scent, a sound and a rhythm. They are dynamic, so have a somewhat independent life once they are 'out there', that is to say they interact with other 'forms' and create new forms, they form waves and streams of consciousness. What happens when we dream is the same process backwards, the mind in its unconscious state acts as a sponge and a conduit to these forms. The nature of our minds, the qualities and dimensions that are integral to it, are different from one person to the next and so the forms that each of us may produce and attract would be both specific and diverse, though still embedded with universal patterns, carried upon a universal wave of consciousness.

The Tyranny of Institutions

Religions, notwithstanding the positive messages that they basically convey to us, have a lot to answer for. The spilling of blood in the name of God is by far the worse and most inexcusable one. Another element of institutional religious instruction is much more subtle and obviously less deadly, but it is pernicious and very damaging to the relationship between us and the Spirit - as it unfolds in

time, it is just as deadly if not even deadlier than the first transgression, because it is responsible for keeping people in a state of fear and conformity and ultimately in a state of blindness. This can be the source of much injustice done in the name of God. It is also in a very real way an institutional interference in what should be the most intimate relationship between us and the Divine. Really, nothing should come between one person and their God, definitely not corrupt individuals who in repeat fashion of the same old story, are there for the power and the glory. Some of them might not even believe in God. This I would imagine is only the case with a minority of individuals - usually amongst those who are in positions of power, but the institutional reality means that even those in lower positions follow in blindness the mistakes and misdemeanours of their superiors, or at least support them by sheer passivity.

The Catholic Church is a prime example, or more specifically the Catholic authority and institution. I know many good Catholics, and this is not an attack on their morality or faith, although it is by their consent that the church maintains its authority. I am highlighting the Catholic institution specifically and above others, because in it is the most distinct combination - of substantial authority over many millions of people, along with some of the most disgraceful corruption. Such criminality and hypocrisy they have conducted themselves with throughout the ages is beyond belief.

I skim through the history of murder and persecution in the so called 'name of God and Christ', the torture, war and general abuse of power in more ways than I could or wish to imagine; the ongoing interference with people's private lives and bodies according to the Church's Middle-ages puritanical mentality, and of course all the child abuse by priests we know of today but must have gone on for many generations. There surely can be no excuse for any of these things to happen, either by commission or omission, especially not by these self-glorified men who appointed themselves as agents of God and Christ.

Reasonable and good people blindly follow their church rules and cower under a regime of fear and the prospect of hellfire. They are like clay in the hands of those who seek to control them. If it wasn't for Christ's message of love, they would be distinctly miserable people, thank God that one thing that does matter is still present at the heart of Christian institutions. Nonetheless, this institutionally filtered message of love comes at a high price for practicing something that can easily be practiced without the "embrace" and "guidance" of the institution.

The Mountain of Good Will by the Gateway of Dream

We are in a cosmic way, always a part of God even when we think we are very far removed from it, or even totally disbelieve its existence. When we look at the cosmos and how small we are compared to it, when we look at the reality of death and suffering, it can be hard to believe that God does care about us earthlings.

Conversely, the contract that was made, with the Abrahamic God at least, at the time that it was made, is one of an enduring relationship - accountability and practice of morality on our part, reciprocated by the One's benevolence and wisdom and blessings, which come in many ways and forms.

If in Truth we find God, then the other way around is also true – God finds us in Truth and embraces us in it. That's why forgiveness and redemption is such an important thing for us to remember. We are all redeemable if we are willing to face our demons and do our best to do our best. Everything that partakes in life on earth is an active contributor to the consciousness of One.

Even in the "afterlife" of transcendent Oneness, there are still individual spirits doing their work by their very being, which transcends time. Furthermore, it is the lives and the souls of highly evolved spirits that form the celestial hierarchy of divine knowledge and consciousness. The oneness of God is also the multiplicity (of lives) by which its consciousness, divine will and divine justice are shaped and articulated.

It may be useful to remember that in order for spirits to be helpful, which I think they want to be, we need to call on them. Whether we have personally known those people, or simply know of them, a genuine mode of communication can be established. In the former case it would be much easier, as the emotional and physical connection that we have to those who have been present in our lives is a powerful foundation, whereas the absence of such connection in the latter case makes communication much more vague and open to misinterpretation, although still possible.

When a particular spirit is called from the place of one's faith, one will find that it usually answers. You can dismiss it as creation of your own mind, and indeed some of these "communications" could be a pure work of the subjective mind and not of any spiritual essence; it takes practice to know one from the other. It's a feeling. Reality is much more subtle and sensitive than people tend to imagine, and the work of consciousness is tightly woven with physical reality.

What we need to remember as people living on the planet now, is that we are a part of a much bigger, more nuanced fabric than we could ever imagine. We are not as separate from each other or from our ancestors or the dead as we tend to think. They are all still out there in the non-material realm of consciousness and collective memory. They can be reached whenever we seek to reach them. It is, one could argue, an exercise of wishful thinking, sheer fantasy and work of the imagination. This is a reasonable question as to what is real against what is merely real in our heads. When we try to establish truth, we normally rely on other people to confirm that such reality we perceive or experience, is also experienced by others. However, faith is a bit different because it relies on direct experience and relationship with the Spirit. It does involve imagination, but this shouldn't be confused with fantasy - they are two distinct things, albeit overlapping as well. Imagination has its own life, we don't have to control and manoeuvre it like we do fantasy. If we direct the power of imagination towards truth, it is like a window that we open or a key that we turn, to enter hidden dimensions - it is about reaching into depths of visions and of reality by way of invocation and faith. This perception can truly alter things as they happen in time - it multiplies and deepens our relationship with The Presence, allowing it to enter our lives.

When First Magic and then Reason Fail Us

When one is imbued with the universal consciousness, meaning, one lives in truth and not in doubt, present in the now, as most creatures are - one has access to a practical, form-building

intelligence. This is the intelligence behind the evolution of species and it is also behind creating powerful ideas and abstract forms that shape the reality around us. It is pure magic. The magical and cosmic Self is embedded in each life to do this business.

In us humans however, this ability has been suspended, at least as far as we can see into the past, because we have gradually lost oneness - the magical rhythm of time and of The Presence - we are living in a world clogged up by manmade ideas and notions. Even before the modern consumerist nonsense that stuffs our minds and batters our souls, we are, our minds are, an obstruction to the magic of nature. But in a way it is our own particular nature, still a part of Nature, to question and doubt. Questioning, examining and doubting, disables the unconscious magical mechanism that happens in nature and drives evolution. This is why all our efforts are rightly geared into finding reason and order in this universe, and invent and build and create things and languages and abstract ideas. Our main path of evolution is one of a spiritual and moral nature, which in a different way to the natural intelligence is an aspect of the divine order itself. We are a particular and most sophisticated life-form driving forward a particular type of consciousness. In the absence or shortfall of a desired reality we fall back on ideas.

If reality, as it comes to you, confounds you beyond the powers to reason or comprehend, then the thing to do is to let go, admit your ever so human limitations with humility, and fall back on the Spirit within you - fall into the fold of her love.

Chapter 8

Visual Meditations

Reframing ideas and thoughts in new ways can at times really help us in achieving clarity.

Approaching a place (in our minds) by a different path, gives us new perspectives.

Many times, even so-called objective problems can benefit from a fresh approach, and when it comes to subjective problems, meaning the way our minds are behaving - fresh frames of reference, creative and imaginative approaches - fulfill a crucial role. The power of visualization in achieving fresh outlook is unrivalled when it comes to reconfiguring our 'mindscapes'. These works of imagination become a creative agent in our psyche and lives. They can also be helpful in dealing with things that inhibit or disturb our sense of self or threaten our peace of mind.

The Cosmology of Self

This question of who we truly are is a most bewildering puzzle, not so much so in terms of the actual reality (it is what it is whether we understand it or not), but in terms of how we perceive and conceptualize ourselves to ourselves. This self-consciousness seems unique to human beings and enfolds within its very being, the reality of judgment, creativity and reflection. As such, it reveals a very particular aspect in the evolution of consciousness. We humans look for meaning and seek to attach value to everything we meet in our lives, this also includes attaching meaning to who we are.

The Self in its purity is divine spark emanating from the One - every living organism carries this spark. However, when this flame of the Spirit is not reflected by the work of self-consciousness, it is like a "constellation" which consists only of one star. There are no planets or moons in this constellation, there is nothing to reflect or benefit from the light of the sun. We could assume that very basic forms of life exist - in terms of their own consciousness - as lone stars, and the work of their spirits as well as the fullness and depth of their souls is thus limited. It's interesting to think of different life forms in relation to human beings. Humans must be at the extreme pole of self-consciousness; our constellations of consciousness seem to have more "planets" and "moons" than any other creature.

In this illustration, the sun stands for the spirit, while the planets are the different aspects of our being in the world – they are the manifestations of everything that life has given each of us – our bodies, our minds, our skills, our environment. All these things shape us in real terms, and they all orbit our inner 'spirit-stars'. All of us I think, have a part of ourselves, a so-called planet in this case, which we tend to identify as who we really are, maybe we can say it is like the Earth in our interior cosmology of being, while the less inhabited planets are marginal aspects of ourselves in terms of how we view our being in the world. If we take this illustration further, we can identify our so-called earth's moons as that which reflect the light of our spirit-sun back to our physical being in the world. We can gaze at the moon orbiting our earth-body, in a way that we would find difficult if we were to gaze at our so-called Sun. The moon in this illustration is our work of self-reflection, also of dreams and the unconscious.

But here we enter into the conundrum of where we place our consciousness or our self-identity, as it shifts between one object and the other – star, planets and moons - we are in fact all of these simultaneously.

This linguistic and so-called objective identification of things which are inherently fluid, is an impossible labyrinth, not only because it is intricate and full of dead ends, but also because we as humans seek more than one destination. We don't only seek being the stars that we are, but we also have an innate need to know who we are and give it shape and quality and value. These two aspects of our human mission - above and beyond simply living in the world - are most of the time embroiled in a type of a conflict, because as soon as our consciousness shifts from being a "star" to being a "planet", our light, that is our spirit, becomes fixed into physical constraints and is subject to the contingencies of all the elements and conditions, which planets are so vulnerable to.

Our primordial light of the spirit can be known and experienced as any of the following: through reflection (by being a "moon"); through exposure to light, of either "sun" or "moon" (being a "planet"); or experienced directly as emanation (being a "star"). The latter is possible when we let go of language and let go of the need to explain things to ourselves. It is a state of enlightenment, and in it our identities are one with the One and the work of ego and self-appraisal invariably falls away, leaving our sense of self empty of definitions, yet full of being. Notwithstanding its absence of definitions, it is a state of the deepest knowledge.

Contrary to general understanding of enlightenment, the work of those who seek truth of the spirit and liberation from ego never ends, even if they are fully awakened. As long as we are alive - present as a human body in the world - this shifting of consciousness between being a star, being a planet and being a moon, doesn't stop. My suspicion is that the myth of a wholly enlightened human being, constantly dwelling in the oneness of it all, is indeed a myth, because in truth our minds are always reflective, our lived-in constellation in which the light of our spirit dwells, always consists of more than just one star, and our physical existences by definition, are planets.

Hence, the work of self-enlightenment according to this illustration is twofold. First it is about clearing the atmosphere surrounding our so-called planet, so we can make full benefit of the light of the spirit-sun as well as the light reflected by our moons. This, in real terms is the work of honest self-assessment - identifying the sources of "mind pollution" and mitigating them, while learning to know our deeper selves. The second is about being able to shift our consciousness of self, if and when we choose, from being the bodily planet that we normally are, to being the spirit-sun that we are in cosmic timelessness - pure being, free and true. Being a "star" however - even if we managed to overcome some of the major "planetary" obstructions - can't be sustained continuously when we have to deal with the extremely particular, temporal, and at times very petty and annoying details of life. The point to know and remember is that who and what we are is not a fixed thing, but light - emanating and reflecting and refracting. Knowing this can set us free from the prison cells that we build around us, liberate us from unfounded fear and misconception. It opens the windows of our lives in such a way that we are able to both give and receive the cosmic gift of light, and of love and wisdom and eternal life.

A Few Words about Light, Shadow and Reflection

I have mentioned already the reflective nature of consciousness. Light is at the very foundation of life - that includes the light of consciousness.

Every object in this world, which is not a source of light, is an object that produces reflections. If we move away from a purely material way of defining things - thoughts are also types of objects, while our minds are the spaces in which these objects reside. Any object under light also produces shadows. This is why the 'shadow self' should always be framed within the reality of light - shadows have no real existence in and of themselves, but are effects of light, and of the reality of being lit.

Revolving Mirrors Meditation

The following visualization evolved for some years before reaching its present form. It can be used both to elucidate the reality of our human Self in the world, as well as applied as a visual meditation.

Imagine three hollow spheres, one inside the other inside the other. Their surface is that of a mirror, both inside and outside. Each surface of each sphere is divided into small rectangles that revolve around an axis of their own at 360 degrees, a bit like revolving windows.

Right at the centre of the picture, inside the smallest sphere, is a light - this is the divine spark and it is the original and eternal Self which is present in each sentient being. The centre sphere surrounds the deep self of the divine light - its inside reflects this inner light, while its outside reflects the "light" produced by the sphere around it.

This second sphere is the place of reflection (conscious mental activities) of the outer self. This is our conscious self - its inside reflects the sphere of the deeper self while its outside reflects the third sphere around it.

This third sphere is the world and all its "images", meaning, the events and people, and places and things that our lives present us with.

Outside of the third sphere is the Transcendent - it is limitless Being and the original shining, it is identical in fact to that inner light, only it is free of any circumference, and therefore free of the limitations of mind and body.

Now imagine the dynamics of the three spheres with their revolving mirrors.

An ideal function of the self in the world would be a state of continuous revolution of each of the three spheres' mirror-windows - this would mean that the deep self is known by the conscious self; that the conscious self in turn is able to realize the deeper self in their lives as it reflects it back to the outer sphere; and the latter allows the transcendent light into our daily lives – meaning, the world and life itself has revealed the nature of its deep reality to us. This would be a state of awakening and as such would present the ultimate manifestation and realization of our human Self in the world.

The usual state of consciousness is one in which the second sphere does most of the work, while the other two and their revolving mirrors stay largely closed, meaning, they don't reveal what lays on

their other side - in the first sphere it is the deep and largely hidden self, and in the outer sphere - the Infinite. The reason for this is that we have less control over the movement of these spheres. Conversely, the second sphere - that of the conscious self, is the one most immediate to our cognition and constitutes by and large our sense of self, or identity. It is contingent on our attitude and the function of our personal cognitive mechanisms.

If we consider that each sphere's "windows" can be activated from either side - then the outside of the first sphere and the inside of the third sphere are activated by the work of the middle sphere, which is very dependent on how we "operate" our conscious lives. Their surfaces are triggered into activity by the kind of reflections they receive. There is, like everything in life, a law of resonance and reciprocation.

If we are sensitive to the fact that our minds are virtual spaces, that thoughts behave like objects, reflecting light and producing shadows, we can start making choices as to how we make this "space" more peaceful and brighter, and also how to effect the opening of the interior and exterior spheres. These will not only amplify our sense of wellbeing, but is the very being itself, the original light which will shine through, into our minds and lives.

To elucidate by example - it is unlikely that either the first or the third sphere will start opening its "windows", if all that we reflect onto them are images and thoughts of darkness and confusion. Conversely if we work to fill our mind-spaces with images and experiences of beauty and love and with thoughts of peace and truth, we will start noticing the shining of inner light. If we carry on in the same way, we will start noticing the shining of the transcendent light of the cosmos. Naturally, it could take a lot of work of bringing in the transcendent light, if our mind-spaces have suffered a lifetime of mistreatment and careless accumulation of dark and ugly things.

As for what is out of our control - it is the inside of the first sphere and the outside of the third sphere that are subject to the transcendent Self. It is possible that even when we do all the good work I have just mentioned, the light may still insist on hiding, and so its windows may remain shut. If this is the case, then it doesn't mean we should stop the good work, it only means that we need to persist and be patient.

It is likely that when the interior sphere opens - its light can be revealed through dreams, deep intuitions, insights, and mystical experiences - the exterior sphere will do the same - the transcendent of the exterior is revealed through unusual events and synchronicities, through moments of revelation and transcendence.

The inside of the outer sphere is the one least subject to our will. From the moment we are born it "reflects" a particular world to us, on which we have little control, and the details of which are totally unique for each of us. If we are lucky the exterior sphere will provide us with plenty of good "images" which will continue to resonate within our consciousness.

What happens when we get stuck in a mode, unable to break free from the merry-go-round of our own minds - can be likened to the three spheres being largely closed, meaning, only a small portion of windows revolving, producing a small amount of new reflections and fresh perspectives. Our consciousness, when the second sphere is too static, becomes limited to the space between

us and the world, or alternatively we become imprisoned in our own minds. In either case, this existence, merely on one 'surface' of our being, is likely to bring about a sense of detachment and meaningless to our lives. Unless the windows keep revolving we end up with the same reflections bouncing back and forth - whether we are stuck between the first and the second spheres (this is the case when we are too caught up in self-analysis and doubt which prevent us from living life to the full), or the second and the third (where we are too busy with life and its demands and make no room for reflection) - the effects are ultimately disabling and stand in the way of growth, fruition, peace and self-fulfilment.

Naturally, as we move from the fields of inner to outer "reality" the impressions become louder and more consuming. All the loud and eventful stuff is happening on the sphere of the outer self whilst the inner flame of divinity is most of the time a quiet constant - it is its constancy and silence that is both the blessing of divine presence and love, but also is at the heart of its elusiveness.

When the inner sphere revolves to reflect back the inner light onto the field of self between the first and second sphere, the mingling of reflection you may get, can be called contemplation - woven are the light and darkness of the world, in the light of the inner Self which is also the absolute of the eternal Self. In turn, as the windows of the second sphere revolve, the inner light that was reflected onto them is then reflected onto the third sphere - inner light is reflected back into the world and the ongoing chain of reflections, within us and indeed in the world around us, becomes infused with more light as it multiplied in subsequent reflections

Experiment in Silence

Today the city agreed to carry on in relative silence. Drivers left their cars at home, we agreed to walk, run or cycle to our destinations; to conduct our conversation in quiet tones, giving space to the silence. We noticed that the space between us had changed, somehow we felt closer, more connected and in tune with one another, the noise and the bustle we normally know had dissolved, like walls around us falling away. We thought that every so often it would be good to stop whatever we were doing, wherever we were going. Each of us did it in their own time as we grew more quiet, and peaceful. No sound of our footsteps crowding our ear, and relentless rushing - we stopped and listened to the silence. We could pay attention to things very closely. We started noticing that silence has a presence - it's not an absence or emptiness of sound, but a wave of barely discernible vibrations. It is smooth, soft and reflective, like a calm river flowing by.

Notes:

ⁱ Hermann Hesse "Siddhartha"- the simile of the river

ⁱⁱ Which some would argue we are already in, but I would argue that it could still get much worse.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am not talking about the perennial evils of war and malevolent rulership but more extreme evil comparable to the Nazi regime, in which ordinary civilians turn into something other than humans, as we understand humanity to be.

^{iv} I am not talking about people with formal authority over us who do have power to do all sorts of things in spite of our resistance

^v This idea is written about in depth in Michel Foucault "Power and Knowledge"

^{vi} Focusing our attention and efforts on the necessary work, as opposed to going back to careless consumption and pollution