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Awakening to a Consciousness of Love and Healing

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Abstract

Awakening to the Consciousness of Love and Healing heralds a radical transformation that can be as life-changing for us – and for those we subsequently touch – as the taming of fire was for our earliest progenitors. Because this emergent Consciousness provides the necessary energy, motivation, and power to support new and creative responses to threat, it also offers a healing alternative to the polarization and conflict we are currently experiencing in the world.

Awakenings to this new Consciousness are occurring more frequently today than in the past. Such a consciousness is not a different way of thinking. It is a different state. An awakened person has an entirely new orientation – one that subsumes and transcends intellect or ego consciousness – both of which must then learn to live in relation to it. Awakening is more than a mental phenomenon: it is physical. One's entire organism experiences the felt energetic connection between human beings and the rest of creation. However, because we lack a common language for such a radical intimacy with life, the message in this short article is carried primarily through image, metaphor, cadence, and story.

Key words: Awakening, Consciousness, Healing, Spirituality, Transformation, Love, Energy, Self, Soul, Relationship, Embodied, Grace, Intuition, Teilhard de Chardin, Polarization, Conflict, Threat, Higher Intelligence, Higher Consciousness, Energies of Love, Spiritual Orientation, Higher Self, Collective Consciousness, Spontaneous Awakening, Orientation of Attention

At a national professional conference thirty years ago, I stood before a hand-painted poster that so captivated me, I wanted it the way a child wants a treasure found at the beach. Since then, that sheet of newsprint has hung where I see it every day. The paint is faded and the paper worn but Teilhard de Chardin's message is timeless:

*When man discovers Love,
 He will have discovered Fire for the Second Time.*

I didn't know the quote or realize it had been distilled from a longer one, but the power of the single phrase that called Love 'Fire for the Second Time' never left me. I recognized in its simplicity

something I had always intuited – that this kind of Love was not the romantic love I'd sought as an adolescent, nor was it the love of a woman for her husband, or a mother for her child. It was something more – something at root, seminal, and forever indefinable. Later, when I saw Teilhard's original words, they gave voice to a much larger vision – one that spanned the story of the human race:

*Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides,
and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of Love,
and then, for a second time in the history of the world,
humanity will have discovered Fire.¹*

Then I understood. The awakening of Love in the human heart was the spiritual journey of our Time: it heralded a transformation that would be as life-changing for each of us—and for all those we subsequently touched – as the taming of fire had been for our ancestors in the wild. Deep within me, I knew that this Love called *Fire* had wooed me from the earliest days of my childhood – I had felt it in my bones. Still, I longed to understand what Teilhard meant, for it was clear that the Love he described in such vivid language was more than a feeling, more than consolation, companionship, or goodness. It was a great and healing power.

I spent the next thirty years living into the questions his koan² raised. It shaped my life. What was this kind of Love? How do we harness it? Why 'energies?' Why *Fire*? To put what I eventually realized into words—to say what Love was *not*, as well as express the depth of transformation it implied—became my soul's imperative, and was eventually given form in my book, *Awakening the Energies of Love: Discovering Fire for the Second Time* (Hillman, 2008).

The ongoing problem with words

This Love called *Fire* is not the love we usually think of. It is *charged*: with the numinous, with light, with aliveness – and also with danger. Anyone who seeks what it means to harness the energies of Love for God needs to be prepared for its power. Teilhard's phrase – *for God* – sets the call to love squarely in the domain of religion and spirituality but for many of us, words like God – or Brahman, the Tao, the Mystery, and many others – can be hard to swallow. For some, such language seems incompatible with their worldviews. Others may feel disappointed with the version of God they absorbed as children. Still other seekers feel spiritually homeless. Words like *God, divine, sacred, holy* – are loaded, encrusted with centuries of misunderstanding and misuse. Like Love, they are but hints and whispers, intimations of the unknown.

Any word we choose is merely a marker. Here, I am using the word Love to refer to a unifying force (or flow) that directs our existence in ways that are healing, wholing. This kind of Love is most often described as the result of transformation.

What is transformation?

There is only one ancient and forever work of art: the slow fashioning of life and the gradual awakening of Love. The invitation to participate in Love's measured emergence has been likened to a call, and although we might resist it (however unconsciously), we are all *already* awakening, all being carried on the same tide, drawn by life as inexorably as the moon draws the movement of the waters. Still, it is so gradual a process, we don't ordinarily notice what is happening within us.

Spontaneous awakenings

There are those in every period, however, who awaken quite suddenly—not only spiritual masters, but our greatest poets, philosophers, mathematicians, and countless ordinary people. These spontaneous awakenings are occurring more frequently today than in the past, and they are quickening all of us. We are all subtly impacted, collectively enlivened by these energies, and our own potential for awakening is accelerated. If you are one who ‘wakes up’ abruptly, you become aware of the vast difference between having thoughts about love... or feelings of love... or sensations associated with love... and coming into a deep relationship with Love, itself. In such a moment, you have awakened to the felt energetic connection between human beings and the whole of creation.

The power of Love may leave you streaming with energy, but this is not a momentary ‘high’ – it’s more like a continuous ‘refining fire’ that works within you at a fundamental level. An awakening burns away all your old ideas about who you think you are – an undressing that takes your identity apart, recreates it, and leaves you vulnerable to the greater life. The self that emerges is not really what you’d call an identity; it’s more like a sense of personhood that includes all you know yourself to be – and more. The late Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue called this quality of self ‘soul:’ “The soul is not simply within the body, hidden somewhere within its recesses. The truth is rather the converse. Your body is in the soul, and the soul suffuses you completely.”³ This self provides an alternative way of relating to others, a new and tender connection with life. You live – not in – but as *relationship*. You open into a collective experience of a radically different quality of Love and gradually become aware that this communion is who you are, at depth.

Probably most of us got our ideas about relationship, how life works, and who we are from parents, caretakers, and teachers, and later, from respected professionals who appeared knowledgeable about navigating the world. Today, however, the majority of these experts from years past have little experiential understanding of this new terrain. They are of another generation of explorations and contributions to the collective awareness of Love.

If we are to respond to our increasingly urgent challenges, we need to find a new orientation that subsumes and transcends intellect – an orientation that is healing. I call the outcome of the awakening experience ‘under-standing:’ we literally *stand under* our knowledge. Awakening offers the possibility of just such an orientation and provides the necessary energy, motivation, and power to support creative responses to threat.

Under-standing from a new orientation

On awakening, we enter a larger field of consciousness which opens us to these possibilities. Then, we need to learn how to live within that Field. This kind of learning is an ongoing process. At its core, it is about attention. The real transformation does not begin for any of us until we take responsibility for the quality and direction of our attention: when we soften our focus, remain alert, and drop deep into the silence of a self we know well enough to be able to let go of the slightest aggression in mind, heart, and body. This is not a matter of thinking differently. It is a matter of learning to inhabit our selves. We do that by becoming as honest as we can through a disciplined practice such as meditation, yoga or a martial art, or psychotherapy (among others). It is a creative inquiry with no map.

As we grow in truth, we come to access life in a far more immediate way. We turn our attention to the Field in which we live and listen, not with our ears, but with a self that is vast. Our entire organism has become an instrument *within which* and *with which* we note what is happening – then ‘listen’ for Love’s way of responding.

The Love to which I refer is a unifying force (or flow) which directs our existence in ways that are healing, wholing. No matter where you are in the awakening process, there are countless doorways to this orientation. In my own spiritual practice, I needed to be embodied. I learned to drop, first, from a head full of thoughts, down into a breadth of human feelings. *They* took me down into the darkness of my body – and then beyond, to the wordless depth – stillness, simplicity. Ease.

You know this place. You are carried on an unseen current the way a seagull hangs in a strong wind over the ocean. It is effortless. You are lived by Life, itself.

A story

Not long ago, I flew into Burbank, California to visit my daughter and was on the road before seven-thirty in the morning. It was very foggy, but as I drove, something led me to turn my attention to that mysterious depth, and I dropped into its embrace. (This is a dangerous thing to do when driving! It is not my usual practice, but I include it – with apologies – because the anecdote offers an easily communicated example of what can happen when you learn to live *as relationship*, e.g., with an embodied attention on the Field.) Ordinarily, I'm pretty tense on California highways and more than a bit fearful – other drivers can be aggressive at times, and fast. But that day, alert and wide open to the unknown, I was aware of a difference: *How pleasant the drive seems! How courteous the drivers, even in rush hour! No one tailgating, no one cutting me off.* It felt utterly remarkable.

I'd driven that freeway countless times, and as I slowed to take the Topanga Canyon exit, I turned east – in the opposite direction from my daughter's home! Continuing along the road, I felt slightly uncertain. Did I miss my turn? *No*, I reassured myself, *I could drive to her house in my sleep!* Still, the surroundings seemed a little unfamiliar. *Oh, it's the fog. Nothing looks the same in the fog...* Further on, I really began to wonder: *Didn't I ever notice these houses before?*

When a large Sears Roebuck showed up, however, I knew I'd never seen it before. I decided to call my daughter and turned into the store's huge parking lot. That early, it was completely empty, but I made three very mindful turns. Each offered the choice of two parking areas, all with at least 500 spaces. The last turn took me into a long empty row right next to the highway I'd left. Half way down, a space looked inviting. I turned in, pulled on the brake, and phoned my daughter. "I've taken a wrong turn on Topanga. It's probably ten miles out of my way." "Oh, mom, have you by any chance noticed a Sears Roebuck out that way?" "Why, yes! That's where I've stopped to call you." "Mom, would you mind doing an errand for me? There's a tiny vacuum cleaner repair shop right across from Sears on the other side of Topanga Canyon Road. We really need the part they fixed today. Could you pick it up for me?"

I glanced up and peered through the fog. "Why, it's straight across the street! My headlights are shining right on its door."

Such simple experiences shine a light into a place we don't often look—an intelligence that does not belong to us, that is not of the thinking mind. I'd set no intention, had no expectations or desires. But I'd been learning the language of Love. When I told my daughter how the morning had unfolded, she said, "Mom, you have the whole universe behind you!" I replied, "So do you! Everyone does!"

Harnessing the energies of Love – the healing alternative to polarization

So do you. We've all had moments when the grace of an unexpected shaft of light breaks in on our ordinary world and leaves us in awe. At those times, we know there is much more going on around us

than we are able to see or feel – a fullness to existence that we'll never be able to name, much as we long to do so. To call its revelations 'synchronicity' scarcely hints at its majesty; to name our stumbling upon it 'intuition' barely touches the edge of the holy garment that enfolds us. This immense and healing Power behind the life we discern with our thoughts is more than we can symbolize: more than nature, more than physics, more than Jung's Self or the luminous universe.

When we learn to rest in its energies, otherness dissolves and we begin to live *as relationship*. We turn to a handful of so-called strangers and know them intimately; know the ancient redwoods in the same way; the stone cliffs, the meadow, and the light shining on the river. We are rapt at our kinship with a blazing world. It is lit up from inside.

We are intended – have an innate tendency – toward this kind of communion, and whatever humility, sanity, and compassion we manage to offer our planet at this chaotic time will be its gifts. Staying attentive to it is the necessary change of mind. It is not the fact of thought that is at issue; it is our inability to withdraw our attention from thought. But once we've learned to let our thinking serve this qualitatively different consciousness, we will have harnessed *Fire* – and become instruments of healing, and a Love, a peace, and kind of perception that the current view of the world finds utterly incomprehensible.

¹ I have chosen to use the better-known version of this quote from Teilhard, although I do not have its source. The original is from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, *Toward the Future*, tr. Rene Hague, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, 87. "The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." (Dated by Teilhard: "Peking, February 1934.") Translator Hague provides this comment on the word ether: "Writing today, Teilhard would say 'space.'" *Author's note*: In the same vein, I have replaced his word man with 'humanity'.

Teilhard was a renowned scientist, paleontologist, and Jesuit theologian. According to his biographer Ursula King, PhD, Teilhard expanded "the dialogue between religion, science and mysticism..." and his "views put him on a collision course with his Jesuit superiors and church authorities in Rome... His powerful vision and life-affirming spirituality speak...vitality to the concerns of our time." Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, back cover.) Born in France in 1881, Teilhard served at the front during World War I after spending three years in Egypt, teaching, and collecting fossils. After receiving his doctorate, he taught in Paris where King says he was considered a "brilliant research scientist and much sought after lecturer." The author of over two dozen books and numerous papers, he lived and worked in many other cities, particularly Peking and New York where he died in 1955.

² A Zen Buddhist teaching statement or story that confuses or puzzles the intellect because it introduces something that is essentially beyond its scope. The koan can provide a pathway between the mind and the heart, not merely to feeling, but to the deep heart at the core of our being.

³ John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara – A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, New York: HarperCollins, 1998, 49. *Author's note*: O'Donohue echoes Meister Eckhart's phrase, "Your body is in the soul."

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