

Caring for the Soul of the World

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Too often, spiritual imagination takes flight from the world and cannot seem to hold together the realm of being with the realm of doing. I once had a dream that showed me this necessity of holding contradictories without seeking resolution.

In the dream, I was in an interior courtyard. A man had fallen to the ground, suffering from a heart attack. I was attempting to do something by pounding on his chest, trying to resuscitate him. I looked up and saw through a window inside a building where a woman was playing a harp, in a way, not doing anything to be of help. The harpist was looking directly at the stricken man and she was singing.

Nothing in the dream indicated that what the harpist or I was doing was misdirected or in error. Both were needed, and needed at the same time; that is, an imagination that encompasses both is needed. The dream put together these two ways of presence—doing and being—and let them live in what might seem to be an inherent contradiction. However, contradictions are no problem for the imagination and, in fact, imagination thrives in contradictions and creates what is new and unknown from them.

We try as hard as we can to do something to improve the world while at the same time we do not get caught in the notion that we, through our efforts alone, can affect change. We have the task, the inner work, of taking in and holding all that is visible of the world, and holding it in tension with all that is invisible and mysterious. That gives room for other, unknown and surprising factors to enter to bring about change. This is the way of the virtues of faith, hope and love, for we do not practice these virtues directly. But by developing imagination, we open a space for them to enter and do their transformative work of bringing the earthly world into coherence with the spiritual worlds.

Imagination has to be prepared for. The mind can think about contradictories, but it cannot hold them and embrace them. The soul can. But it has to expand a great deal to be able to do so. This soul expansion takes the form of loneliness, darkness and silence. We see terrible destructiveness in the world. Not only all the violence and the terror, but also the numbing comfort and psychopathic doubling, the immensity of concentrated political and economic power. We prepare the imagination by feeling how alone we are in knowing that nothing can change without the conscious presence of soul as a central factor in life. We can only look on, feel the darkness, enter into silence, and wait. Then, slowly, almost imperceptibly, the dawn arises. We see soul where it did not seem to be. It is there in our cities and our architecture, in our education, our technology, and in our diseases.

We do not try to put soul into the world, but learn how to apprehend it. Soul, it has to be understood, does not make things better—it makes them more complete. And that is the necessary condition for types of change that will not produce further suffering under the guise of improvement.

When imagination awakens, we do not at first see the soul qualities of the world. Not at first. Rather, we see our own brokenness. The state of the world reflects back to us our own inner state. We see that what is out there is in here. That is a great gift because then we don't go around projecting the world's problems on everyone else. It is not a matter of taking blame for the destruction we see. That would be egotistical. Rather, it is the moment of awakening to the reality that our soul and the world soul are inextricably intertwined. It is also the moment of awakening to the fact that whatever we do to know our own inner life more fully will resonate in some way in the world.

When we can feel that our soul and the world soul function as a unity and can thus feel the suffering of the soul of the world as if it were our own suffering, this intersection, felt in this way, is already an act of sacred service. It is sacred service in two ways. First, it is not an attempt to do something that we think will be of help. That form of service always has the dangers of egotism, of doing something to help others or the world because it makes me feel better about myself. In this meeting at the intersection, however, there is nothing to do. The meeting, in a way, is felt as an inner emptiness. We only feel the suffering of the soul of the world. That alleviates the major source of suffering—isolation.

Second, these moments are moments of sacred service because it is in these moments of emptiness that other forces can enter, spiritual forces that can inspire us to do exactly what is needed without imposing anything of our own desires. And what we are inspired to do, more often than not, is something very small and imaginative. Maybe I am inspired to place a flower in a room that lacks any sense of soul. Or I do a conscious act of meditation in which I enter into the interior of my heart and, from that center, radiate a field that surrounds a person diagnosed with an illness, without the intent to work against the wisdom of the illness. What is asked for in such moments comes to us rather than being planned by us.

The measure of the success of attending to the soul of the world is the failure to desire success. We are being asked to alter our criteria for determining the outcome of what we do. We cannot apply the same criteria for soul work as we do for ordinary functional



The Siege of Sarajevo

Cellist Vedran Smalovic played a requiem for the dead every day following the massacre of 16 people in a bread queue by a mortar bomb. Around 250,000 people died in the civil war between Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs in the years 1992-1995.

activity. If we desire for something to happen by being present through soul to soul, that is an indication that we have left the experience of soul and are back into ordinary consciousness. This stance of refraining from desire, however, is somewhat different than the well-known spiritual dictum that it is important to be detached from outcomes, which usually means being detached from all desire. For soul to do its work we need to be detached from the desire for success, but not detached from desire. Desire is the great net thrown out by God to draw everything back to the Source of creation. To be in soul is to be in this large current of desire. Not our own private desire, but the world-force of desire. To attend to the soul of the world thus means that the currents of desire are felt as a bodily experience, primarily in the region of the heart. When we are in soul connection with the suffering of the world, we feel it in our heart. Something very palpable happens. We feel warmth in the region of the heart. We feel a radiating from the center of the heart.

The more we become accustomed to these currents and the stronger they become, the more powerful the work of caring for the soul of the world. Yes, power is involved in soul work. Power is good. In the realm of the soul, for example, intelligence is the power of thought. Satisfaction is the power of feeling. Accomplishment is the power of the will. There is nothing the matter with power. We look at the suffering of the world and see that much of it seems to be the result of actions of power. It is the tendency for power to accumulate itself and not power per se that is the source of danger and the source of so much suffering. Power changes the world. Power that accumulates detracts from the world because it is only interested in power for power's sake. Many spiritual disciplines try to stay away from power. Soul work with the soul of the world does not. The radiating warmth of the heart is powerful and does something in the world. In soul work it is quite easy to become interested in the enjoyable feelings of being in the heart. It is imperative to learn to focus not on the feelings of the heart but on the qualities radiating from the heart. When we become centered in the feeling it is a sign that soul work for the sake of the world has introverted and become soul work for the sake of personal feeling. This is a form of accumulating power. In the work of sacred service for the sake of the world, the power of power is relinquished. Knowledge, effort, and feelings of satisfaction must never accumulate.

Working through soul to be present to the soul of the world is known only through the heart and never by the action done. From the outside, the things we do in relation to the world do not seem to be any different than the actions anyone else does. No observer will usually be able to tell that you are caring for the soul of the world. What is done is different, but the differences are subtle. Soul work of any kind lies in the art of the subtle. It is the constant effort to work from the balancing center of our being, the heart, but not to exclude the head or the will. And this soul work has deep faith that the radiations from the heart center are powerful and change the field of interactions in the world in ways that are typically initially unknown, ways that lie in the physics of the indeterminate.

GET INVOLVED | MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Global Commons Movement is Exploding Participate in World Commons Day, October 15, 2010

The World Commons Day will be a day of public real or virtual actions, presentations, debates, workshops, shows and meetings taking place around the world to share the visions and practices of the commons. The goal is to help people become aware of the importance of the commons for the preservation of the planet Earth for the present and the future of mankind.

The World Commons Day aims to complement and mirror thousands of initiatives worldwide, initiatives that defend our right to share knowledge and education and the right to public services like water supply and health. The World Commons Day will focus on the creativity of people in protecting their environment and the cornucopia of bio-diversity in securing their food-sovereignty and promoting radical decentralized energy production based on renewables.

The World Commons Day will make clear that talking about the commons is talking about our quality of life. It's about the freedom to take our lives in our own hands and to strengthen the diversity and the wisdom of traditional knowledge systems; it will show the need for shared public space and urban commons; it will show the numerous initiatives for making the commons work for people when people work in common.

Many important organizations, coalitions, unions, and social and citizen movements nourish and implement this idea, including *Kosmos Journal*. Reclaiming the commons is an enormous challenge we can only bear if the core ideas of the commons are appropriated and shared by many.

What is the World Day of Commons?

It is an auto-managed and decentralized initiative. Each person, organization, social or citizen movement can organize something and link their activity to the World Commons Day. All suggestions and activities scheduled for that day will be announced on the website of the Manifesto Reclaim the Commons. (See *Kosmos Journal*, Fall/Winter 2009 for the Manifesto.) All initiatives can use the Manifesto logo. The website will help to link initiatives with each other and encourage more initiatives to participate.

Who is organizing the World Commons Day?

It is being organized by the organizations or groups working on commons issues. The Manifesto facilitation group will set up a secretariat to prepare for the World Commons Day. The secretariat is open to all organizations and social and citizen movements who signed the Manifesto Reclaim the Commons.

Let the secretariat know you will participate in the World Commons Day by sending a message to facilitation@bienscommuns.org.