

THE MEDICINE OF LOVE **(WITHIN THE PANDEMIC OF FEAR)¹**

What is clear is that a hard road lies ahead. I imagine we can all agree on that. But inner change rarely takes place without pain, and our fear today can be seen as a symptom of awakening to realities that we had not had to face so consciously before. Like a comet bringing panic and awe to people of old as it scorched through the night sky, seemingly disobeying the laws of the natural world, so too this COVID-19, whatever its source and substance, can be a catalyst for death *and* a new way of living.²

We are entering, I suggest, a time in which cataclysms will become the new normal, but a time too, in which a possibility is dawning for fresh ways of living on this troubled earth. Though our current materialistic paradigm is in full spate, is there not also, somewhere in the mystery of the world soul, a sleeping giant that is stirring, stretching and beginning to open its eyes? I will give an example.

Twenty eight years ago, there took place in the city of Mozart a world gathering to look into how uranium is affecting our lives. Astonishingly, the organisers were able to bring together people from all walks of life, some of whom had never even held a passport; not only scientists, nurses, social workers, doctors, therapists and journalists, but indigenous people whose land, health and communities had been ruined through those terrible atomic experiments. Together, they described the traumas, social disruptions and toxicity that has accompanied each stage of uranium's journey from its extraction, refinement and transportation to its use in bombs and power stations and the disposal of its waste. Each person told a part of the story. Some vented their rage. Some wept.

On the last day, they faced the question of what to do with the waste that will poison the earth, waters and atmosphere for millennia to come. They discussed the options already being used of sending it out into space or burying it in lead and concrete containers deep in the ground or oceans. But what most spoke to people's hearts was the idea of keeping it here on the ground with us, in places of isolation that will one day become sacred, because they bring us face to face with our greatest and holiest fear, which is death.³

How little effect this conference appears to have had! Humanity has continued to pollute, and our lives to be infected with poisons and shocking acts of abuse. But something took place at that world gathering on a deep soul level, which is inscribed in the human story, even if it has been buried by the self-centredness and stress of our lives. A new kind of community was born, as a prototype for the future, that crosses racial and class boundaries and is drawn together through pain that is owned by everyone, along with the moral responsibility that arises from it.

Another shining example - of a warrior for truth and love - is the American lady who took the name of *Peace Pilgrim* when the Korean War broke out in 1953. Giving up her former identity and life, she made a commitment to keep walking, for as long as humanity does not recognise the need for peace. For 28 years, she carried nothing except the clothes she was wearing (including the tunic with her new name printed on it) and a few essentials, as her way of testifying to the spiritual power of peace. Still radiant and healthy, she was in her seventies when death took her away suddenly in a car crash.⁴

Why does COVID-19 so much grip the fears of millions of people? Dare I say, it is because we have lost faith in what a human being is and can become? We are giving over responsibility for our own life and death to forces beyond our control. We are losing the

firmness of the spirit and becoming blind to our own deep source of moral intelligence. We are in danger of succumbing to the spectre of a life and a death without dignity or meaning. Not just through our response to this particular virus, but also through our environmental abuse and separation from the sources that sustain us.⁵

And yet, in this anxious time of isolation, we have the opportunity to make a change through our own resolve and will. In this lies the reality of the human spirit, for we are not only the most dangerous entities on this planet, we are also the only ones through whom a true healing can come. To claim that we are simply biological robots or intelligent apes - or a chance concatenation of neurones, genes, chemicals and sub-atomic particles - is to sidestep completely the responsibility we carry for the whole future of earth existence.

Everything depends on our awakening, however - not only to what is happening now, but to our essential nature as spiritual beings who have had the courage to enter this world of matter and energy at this critically important time, in order to achieve something which can only be done here. That is to say - in the midst of the huge soul trials we are facing and will continue to face for a long time - to develop, out of free will, a new power of love.⁶

To those brought up exclusively with the idea that matter and material energy are the only realities, such a statement will sound insane. But the strangest thing about the paradigm of scientific materialism is that it uses spiritual activity to deny itself. Allow me to explain.

The Spirit that Denies Itself

What is science? In its essence, it is a search for truth. What inner disposition is needed to achieve this? At its highest level, pure selflessness! To be able to recognise what is revealing itself through one's observations, one has to stand aside from preconceptions and desires. This is spiritual activity. The same is true for doctors, teachers and many other professionals. If one's interpretation of a situation is tarnished by subjective whim, one is not in tune with its truth and the consequences could be very serious.

The problem is that we modern people do not trust ourselves or others either to be objective or truthful! Nor do we trust our thinking, because we see it as a subjective process. As a result, we have, little by little, removed the human being from the actual scientific process and have become mere spectators of what the machines and highly technical procedures, which we have created, record. We have handed over the high calling of scientific moral rigour, which can only be achieved through self-transformation, to machines that have no self and no inner life.

The root of this bizarre process of human estrangement is our lack of self-knowledge. This has reached such proportions that even 'common sense' – and our sense of purpose in being on this earth – are becoming so whittled away that we are inviting machines and experts (who also rely on machines) to take over the direction of our lives! We do not need conspiracy theories to explain why we are under increasing surveillance and control through all kinds of electronic gadgets. We are calling it upon ourselves.⁷

In Christopher Fry's renowned play, *A Sleep of Prisoners*, published shortly after the end of the second world war, one of the characters makes a speech, which includes the following astonishing sentences:

*Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to meet us everywhere,*

*Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul-size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake, for pity's sake? 8*

What is our answer to this question three generations later? Are more people awake to the ominous signs *and causes* of environmental, economic and societal collapse – or are we even more asleep in our separated worlds of virtual reality? Time will tell, no doubt quite soon, but the danger of losing touch with the reality of the human soul and spirit is greater than ever before.⁹

We alone, out of all earth's inhabitants, have the capacity to change ourselves out of conscious intention. And if this is ever lost or thrown away, then humanity *is* no more, and we are indeed simply what most of us have been told we are throughout our education, re-enforced through the media and our screens: violent, intelligent apes and highly wasteful and inefficient biological machines, within a meaningless, random existence.

So, is there really any hope?

Of course there is, but it all depends where one puts one's focus. Think, for example, of the discovery of the jungle of viruses and bacteria within our gut, on which we depend for our digestive processes and the development of immunity. Does this not change one's attitude towards the current virus, which has been declared a world enemy?¹⁰ Think too of how the long-held idea of the brain's central control over all the body's processes is being shaken by the discovery of neurone-supported intelligence in our gut and hearts. Does this not give us a fresh perspective on how our human society could become, no longer with one centre controlling all aspects of our lives, but through a co-working of all its parts?¹¹

Add to this, too, the growing recognition of the need for ways of agriculture, such as bio-dynamic farming, that not only keep the earth as it is now, but bring healing to it. The time of regarding nature as something we can manipulate in whatever way we choose has certainly not come to an end – and the way we treat animals is a ghastly example of it – but the foundations are beginning to crack, as new insights and intuitions find their mysterious ways into human heads *and hearts*.¹²

A fundamental problem is that what children and adolescents are taught in school is generally decades behind these frontiers of science. And the old, tired refrain of Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' is still churned out as a dogma in classrooms the world over, with its terrible psychological and social consequences. How often are students also told that Darwin himself began to question his own theory in old age, as he felt the barrenness in his soul life that resulted from it?¹³

Within the terrible destructiveness of modern times, a different scientific paradigm is arising, which perceives the world not just clinically but artistically and holistically. The reality it portrays is no less truth-based than materialism. The great difference is that it honours life and recognises that, to comprehend it, one has to enliven one's own perceiving, thinking and imagination. It is not a counter-movement, but *a next step* in the

long journey of scientific progress. *What is its secret? It is the union of scientific method with love.*

The Re-birthing of Spirit as Love *within* the Scientific Process

This love is neither sentimental nor emotional, but an attitude and presence, which includes trust, openness, patience, humility, devotion, gratitude, respect and interest, along with an unconditional commitment to truth. It calls on the ability to enable what is being observed to reveal itself in its own language, time and way. It is not only love for one's *task* as a scientist (which is already a high achievement), but love *as an essential aspect of the scientific way of working*.¹⁴

A clear example is the increasingly respected phenomena-based approach to nature research, which also opens the door to the role that intuition plays in discovery, alongside observation and reason. It brings the joyful light of scientific enquiry closer to the lives of anyone who is willing to refine his observation skills. For science is a *human* process, accessible to all who have a sense of wonder, and that includes every healthy child. Its most essential instrument is not a machine but the refined and active human soul itself.¹⁵

Experienced teachers know well the transformation that can take place in a student's achievement when she learns to love what she is studying, instead of cramming it into her brain for an exam. If they are brave enough, they will also acknowledge how often a solution to a problem in class can appear, in the moment, as an intuition. Why should these essential aspects of education and of life - revealing, as they do, a practical connection with a higher level of our own being - be excluded from that most prestigious of all learning professions today, science?

Is it, indeed, possible to understand *anything* without bringing some measure of love towards it, whether through wonder or interest? One can remember and mechanically repeat, one can apply, extend and relate one 'byte' of information to another, one can even train oneself to pass exams in this way, but if there is no love, can we *comprehend* it? And if there is no interest in other human beings, will there ever be an end to war?

Today's 'Open Secret'

What does this mean practically? The answer to that vital question, from philosophers, quantum physicists, spiritual scientists and many other creative people, is both wonderful and shocking. *Our future humanity will be what we create it to be!*¹⁶

This is our challenge, more extraordinary even than science fiction: to recreate ourselves, moment by precious moment, as truer human beings than we have ever been in the history of humanity, or sink down to the level of clever, but lazy, animals or biological robots, glued into the worldwide electro-magnetic web for a meaningless eternity. What is happening now is a *spiritual* battle for the survival – and re-creation – of meaning in our existence. A battle between very different *ideas and images* of what a human being is and can become, and of what the world is in which we are embedded.

If I think myself an animal, then that is what I become. If I think myself a machine, then that too becomes my self-determined destiny. It takes time, but it happens. Equally, if one decides that selfishness is the only sensible way of living, then life will accommodate to that whim and we will find ourselves ever more disconnected from each other. And if I

proclaim that I have no power, since everything is determined outside me, then that will be the sad person I am.

The way we think of ourselves also affects our picture of what is around us. If one's self-image is a machine, then that becomes the *lens* through which one sees the world. And so it truly *is* a machine. If we see ourselves as apes, then the laws of the jungle will prevail (as they do already in many aspects of political, scientific and economic life) and the capacity for conscious moral development will atrophy. But equally, if one recognises one's capacity for inner change, then one also experiences a new wonder in nature's wisdom. A light shines into the soul, illuminating the peace-bringing activity of love in daily life.

Never have the stakes been so high, not only because of outer events, but our own evolution. What, then, at this pivotal moment, is the task which we are being called upon to take hold of? *To bring healing on this earth, at every level of existence.* And what is the power which, above all, can bring this healing? It is love. Love that is active and awake, love that takes its rightful place within this physical universe.¹⁷

The lure of materialism is to pretend that we can live without pain or even death. But pleasure evaporates if there is no pain and life loses its infinite preciousness without death. Illness is in this world, not as an evil to be eradicated, but a symptom of what is going wrong and a catalyst for change. And death, as we come to terms with its inevitability, makes us more humble, forgiving and wise. Life is a gift, a grace; but death is a spiritual teacher.

Must one say then that love too can only be real through the existence of hatred? And that goodness only finds itself in the presence of evil? All I can say is that the level of challenge today, and of hatred, deception, hopelessness and fear, calls on us to make changes in ourselves and our world which otherwise would take much longer. And my sense is that in this time of testing, both good and evil are growing stronger. Likewise, fear and love.

Our Existential Question

So we come to the existential question: What kind of world do I intend to create with others? And how can I summon up the courage to turn this into an unshakeable decision of the will? It can begin in a thousand ways, but even the tiniest inner change creates a force that can resonate with changes in others. As scientists and artists of life, we can discover for ourselves the mysterious interweaving of souls, within the 'world soul'.

Just as a typhoon has its origins in small movements of pressure, warmth, air and water, so too do small *inner* movements become a sea-change in human consciousness. As people wiser than myself have realised, every true resolve calls up forces of support which otherwise remain dormant. Such is the world-changing power of the human spirit, which so much of our proud modern erudition denies.¹⁸

How was it that the Berlin Wall could be taken down in 1989, 'when the time was right', without armed insurrection or bloodshed? How, too, could one man from South Africa and another from India be imprisoned for years with hard labour and yet be able to forgive and, through this act of unconditional love, inspire millions of people around the world to new possibilities of societal development, even if it has been so hard to sustain them?

How, again, could a simple lady from Albania and the women who worked with her have the strength to live in one of the hottest, poorest, most polluted and illness-riddled cities on

earth (at that time), giving desolate people the gift of being loved as they died? They wore no hermetically-sealed space-suits. With their own hands, they washed and embraced bodies eaten up by starvation and disease, and yet retained their own health.¹⁹

Are these not symptoms of a warm, peaceful, active spirit-light shining into human hearts through the cracks in our armour of prejudices and fears? Are we not, right now, at a pivotal moment in the human story, when the World Spirit holds its breath, waiting to see what individual human beings will do with the power that has been given to us? Perhaps the following words, from a man who devoted his entire life and his extraordinary capacities to the renewal of world culture and human potential in our time, can help us find our way towards an answer:

*Love is for the world what the sun is for outer life. No soul could live if love departed from the world. Love is the moral sun of our world. To spread love over the earth to the greatest degree possible, to promote love, that alone is wisdom.*²⁰

Ben Cherry

1. This article is a sequel to *The Pandemic of Fear (and the Medicine of Love)*.
2. Until recently, the sighting of a comet was always an omen, and a harbinger of change.
3. *Poison Fire, Sacred Earth* took place in Salzburg in 1992. The option referred to was brought by Joanna Macey, founder of the Nuclear Guardianship Project and the Council of All Beings. Her deeply moving speech is available on the *Poison Fire Sacred Earth* website.
4. See: peacepilgrim.org where a book about her can be acquired free. During 28 years of walking in North America, her central article of faith was: *'When enough of us find inner peace, our institutions will become peaceful and there will be no more occasion for war.'* Clearly that critical mass of people has not yet been reached. I wonder, is it coming closer through COVID-19?
5. Compare the wisdom in ancient communities, through their connection with a reality greater than themselves and their sense of guardianship of the earth. Books by Dr Lissa Rankin and others demonstrate how living in tune with nature enabled such cultures to endure so long. It is estimated, for example, that the culture of the first inhabitants of Australia lasted for as long as 80,000 years.
6. Recognising and creating purposeful tasks in life is a fundamental aspect of psychological and physical health. Out of many books about this, a good example is *Why on Earth?* by Signe Schaefer.
7. This is not to deny the powerful forces exploiting us via surveillance and online manipulation. Many writers are drawing attention to this, not least Naomi Klein, whose recent article in the Guardian makes chilling reading. See: www.theguardian.com/news/2020/may/13/naomi-klein. Another excellent resource is the research of Lena Pu. Her website is: lenasfabulousfrequencies.com
8. Published in 1951, *A Sleep of Prisoners* tells the story of four English prisoners of war locked in a church overnight, and the powerful visions that arose in them: ISBN 01921131
9. In this article, the word 'soul' refers to the personal inner life of sensations and impulses, a world which animals also experience. 'Spirit' refers to the uniquely human power to change oneself consciously. Perhaps the most profound researcher ever of these levels of our humanity was Rudolf Steiner. Relevant books include: *How to Know Higher Worlds*, *Theosophy* and *The Philosophy of Freedom*.
10. See, for example, the rousing and very well-informed interviews with Dr Zach Bush on <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=5RAAtFBvKrVw> & his website <https://zachbushmd.com>

11. We are so fixed on the idea of governments directing all aspects of our lives that it is hard to imagine a society in which cultural, political and economic decisions are made by people who actually work in those areas. The need for this interdependence is urgent, as the alliance between big business and government wreaks havoc on our lives. See, for example, the prolific and well-researched writing of Nicanor Perlas, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003.
12. Organic farming and permaculture are growing in response to the accelerating destruction of the earth and nature. In Bio-Dynamic farming, the emphasis is not only on reclaiming soil fertility, but on healing it and bringing it to a different level. For more information, see: www.biodynamics.com
13. For example, 'My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts' and 'If I had my life to live over again, I would make it a rule to read some poetry and listen to music at least once every week.' He also had a more compassionate attitude towards animals than is the case with many scientists and farmers today
14. This applies equally in the huge social challenges we face today. If one has no interest in other people, then clearly no love can develop. If love is a great mountain to scale, then interest is its foothill!
15. One of the pioneers of this holistic science, which is being practised worldwide, was W.J.Goethe. An impressive representative of it today is Craig Holdrege in the USA. See natureinstitute.org
16. The breakthroughs of quantum physics took the world by storm in the film *What the [bleep] Do we Know?* two decades ago. How much more has evolved since! See, for example, thrivemovement.com
17. The reason why the spiritual science, founded by Rudolf Steiner, has the potential to bring healing into every level of human society is that the picture it elaborates of the human being within the wholeness of existence is so rich, detailed and multi-faceted. The most comprehensive portrayal of this is to be found in his book *Esoteric Science*. For more information see: goetheanum.org
18. Consider R.W.Emerson's famous statement: '*Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen!*' The same idea was spoken of in more detail by W.J.Goethe.
19. As well as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, one could name thousands of others who have transformed the world through their moral integrity. I chose these two because their deeds took place openly on the world stage, but my essential point is that none of this could have happened without the deeds they performed in the privacy of their *inner* worlds. With respect, too, to Mother Theresa and her co-workers in Calcutta, one can ask what this *inner* power is, which enables people to go through hell and maintain their humanity and health?
20. Part of a lecture given by Rudolf Steiner in Zurich in 1912. I think it was in a cycle called *The Social Future*. If any reader knows its origin more precisely, I would be grateful to hear!