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## Divine Entanglement

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When I engaged my first spiritual teacher, at least where I identified that is the label I had put on him, the first thing he wanted to know was, “Why are you here? What do you want?”

These questions, or some form of them, have shaped my professional life in profound ways.

Anyone who comes to see me for counseling or spiritual direction hears these questions at the beginning of the session. “What would have to happen for this to be a useful time for you?”

I encourage you to ask questions like that when you come here? “What are you looking for? What are you hoping for?”

I don't remember exactly what I said in response to his question but I remember his answer well. I think it was meant to put me at ease as well as deal with the issue that put me on the path that has led to my standing here today. He said, “If we could put all the people in the world in one room and if they were able to be honest with each other, the thing we would all say is something about how frightened we are.”

It is true isn't it?

We come into this world with a brain that is equipped with an automatic survival device that causes us to wonder what is going to happen next. Is what is coming around the corner friendly or not? We have a whole list of things that make us anxious. We wonder about aging parents, about our partners, about our own health. We pray, whether we are religious or not, about the safety and wellbeing of our children and grandchildren.

Just this week I read of a mother in Idaho who was out shopping with her children. Her two year old child, who was sitting in the shopping cart, somehow got into her purse found her handgun and shot and killed his mother. How would you like that

for a legacy? Later in life someone will ask, “Where is your mother?” “Dead.” “I’m sorry. How did she die?” “I shot her when I was two.”

I remember in my clinical training when I was first sent out on my own to visit patients and their families in the hospital where I trained my supervisor said, in response to my “what-the-heck-am-I-going-to-say-and-do?” concerns, “Don’t worry about it. Just be a non-anxious presence.” That is one of those things that is far easier to say than do. We are, all of us, anxious about so much so much of the time.

It may not show but I have numerous anxieties about being here. Though I know that speaking in public is the thing most people say they fear the most, that’s not what I am talking about.

I get anxious about the fact that some of you are relatively new to this gathering. Perhaps today is your first time. You haven’t heard the talks that have gone before that have led up to where we are in going through the Gospel of Thomas. I worry that just jumping in is going to sound to some of you like just go much gibberish.

On the other hand, if I repeat a lot of what has gotten us here, those of you who have been around for a while are going to be saying to yourselves, at least this is my fear, “Oh no! Here we go again over the same old ground.”

Jesus didn’t seem to have any of these concerns. He clearly repeated the same thing over and over and over. That is how and why people remembered it. Further, if he wasn’t busy repeating himself, he seemed to just pop off with these brief aphorisms and stories, most of which can be repeated in less than a minute, that were so challenging and confronting or comforting that some people gave up everything to be with him while others wanted to kill him.

That’s another anxiety I have: Jesus.

I know that there are a significant number of people in this room who have no patience for or tolerance of organized religion. You have gotten rid of it, thank you very much. And likely, along with it, gotten rid of Jesus as well. You don’t talk about Jesus to your friends outside of here. You could likely count on the fingers of

one hand the number of people in this space today who begin conversations with your friends by saying something like, “What do you think Jesus really meant when he said . . . ?”

I don't blame you. The very mention of the word “Jesus” reminds many people of all the things, past and present, that are genuinely wrong with organized religion. Perhaps you have crossed paths with people who claim to be Christians who, in your experience, have been the meanest, most divisive, judgmental people you've ever met. All the time they are claiming that what they are saying and doing is out of some kind of devotion of the Lord. The historical record of what has been done in the name of Jesus is not good. Further, if you extend it out, most of the world's current woes are the result of religious fundamentalism.

I am not needlessly naive. What I would say about my own spiritual orientation is that I embrace the realistic hard-headed, open hearted hope of the Judeo-Christian tradition as seen in the prophets and Jesus. That is why I show in the announcements slides one that says “Everyone is welcome in Ordinary Life” and along with it the familiar “unity” or “coexist” logo. This logo comes in many different forms. By the way, the symbols on the sign are: Islam, Peace sign (N D means nuclear disarrangement), the “e” sign stand for male and female equality, there is the star of David, the “i” stands for the I Ching - it is topped with the Buddhist Wheel of Dharma, the Yin and Yang symbol, followed by the Latin Cross.

On the front page of one of the humor magazines I take was a cartoon showing people carrying these symbols and the people are clearly in conflict with each other. To repeat: most of the world's current woes are the result of religious fundamentalism. So, when someone moves outside of tribal loyalties, trouble lies ahead.

For example, it seems to upset the bejesus out of a lot of Christians for me, or any other person who has beliefs similar to mine, to say something like, “God is not going to send anybody to hell.”

By the way, I am more grateful than I could say to St. Paul's. What I teach couldn't be taught in most churches.

A few weeks ago I quoted Jim Palmer, author of many books, his most recent being Inner Anarchy, on fifteen things Jesus didn't say.

(Here is a link to that talk - <http://static.squarespace.com/static/502efdd9e4b00d577d1333e8/t/548f14f9e4b03d9f5cd9e469/1418663161630/12%3A14%3A2014+-+Listen+Again.pdf> )

In another one of his posts Palmer gives a list of fifteen things Jesus did say. If you listen to them, I think you'll agree that most of Christianity does not present this image of Jesus - which is one of the reasons I keep talking about him. Here is Jim Palmer's Fifteen Things Jesus Did Say:

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“There's only one litmus test to authenticate if someone gets what I'm about – love.”

“The kingdom of God is here and now, which means it's not somewhere else and later.”

“If you've reached perfection on your journey, feel free to judge others. Otherwise, be quiet.”

“My peace is not as this world gives. Your strategy to control circumstances in order to be happy won't work... ever.”

“You religious people have your nose buried in the Bible, feeling all smug about your spiritual maturity. But you wouldn't know my truth if it knocked you in the head.”

“There is no mountain, sacred place or church building where God expects to be worshiped. True worship is a way of seeing – it's spotting and honoring the divine in all things.”

“You think you are doing well because you have not been hauled off to prison for murder, but your harsh and critical spirit is no different.”

“Embracing my truth will make you a heretic in most people’s minds and you will be persecuted. No worries; you’re on the right track in my kingdom.”

“God and I are one, you are included.”

“I have to die. Otherwise, you’re going to create a religion around my human personhood and personality, rather than embrace and give expression to my spirit and truth.”

“Don’t say you love God and then hate people. Those two things can’t be true at the same time.”

“You and God are not separated and never have been. You are connected to God like a branch to a vine – the essence and nature of God is the sap running through your veins.”

“You can’t reduce my way to a book. The same spirit that filled and led me fills and leads you. Follow that spirit.”

“You think your humanity is an affront to God. If this were true how could I be one with God?”

“You look into the sky to find some God that sits on a throne. You want to see God? You’re looking at him. Now, see that same God as yourself.”

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I need to be clear: Jesus did not start the Christian religion and if he were here today I doubt he would be one. If so, would he be part of any group that denied anyone full participation at all levels in its structure? The answer is, “No!” Contemporary ecclesiastical organizations do not own Jesus. In most cases they have simply hijacked him.

It is ironic that the greatest impediment in coming face to face with Jesus and the Christ he reveals may just be the religion founded in his name. A heavy handed doctrinal emphasis and a guilt inducing moralism have resulted in a loss of the “beginner’s mind” and non-dual mystical teachings of Jesus.

However, Jesus was a real person who needs, in my opinion, to be heard. There has been a movement - reflected in things like the Jesus Seminar, scholars like Reza Aslan, people like Rob Bell, Richard Rohr, Jim Finley, yours truly and a growing number of others who want to offer a reinterpretation of Jesus and his true legacy.

If you take Jesus out of the confining box that what I call “imperial Christianity” put him in what you find is a radical revolutionary who challenges the status quo. His primary teaching was about what he called the “kingdom of God” which, he taught, was not a place off out there somewhere but right here. We are in it right now and it is in us right now. The task of non-dual spirituality is to grasp this. You don’t have to be a religious scholar to do this. It is likely helpful to have access to good religious scholarship. In this regard, I love something Neil deGrasse Tyson says: “The good thing about science is that it’s true whether or not you believe in it.”

Most people want walking a spiritual path to be without any difficulty or inconvenience whatsoever. Jesus, as well as other spiritual masters, said, “The way I am offering you is straight and difficult and the gate you have to go through is narrow. It is the way to destruction that is easy.” But, that is how a lot of people want it: a religion that is fun and easy, one that will energize and entertain me and, most of all, make me prosperous.

When we were on the pilgrimage trip last summer, we started where the original pilgrimage to Santiago began in LePuy, France. The first ones to make the pilgrimage took a year to make it. It was difficult for them in ways we can just barely imagine. Much easier now, even if you walk the entire way - which would probably take a couple of months.

When we got to Santiago and went into the cathedral one of the things I did was go into the shop in the cathedral to see if they had any prayer beads or crosses I might like to add to my collection. As I walked around the shop, I saw a book in their

bookstore that simply appalled me. It was: “The Thirty Second Bible: The 50 most meaningful moments of the Bible, each explained in half a minute.” Though you don’t have to be a religious scholar to grasp the realm of reality Jesus taught about, something more than this, much more, is required.

You don’t have to be a spiritual master to be able to do this either. Though it is likely helpful to have a trustworthy spiritual teacher. What Jesus said was required was to have the mind of a child and trust the inner knowing and experience that comes from receiving and giving love.

So I’ve given an over arching and, hopefully, all encompassing title to all of these talks: Seeking to Embody the Spirit of a Revolutionary Mystic. I just wanted to put it out there that I offer them with a variety of anxious background noisy thoughts: I don’t want to turn you off, bore you or offend you. Those are just the realistic risks involved in such an undertaking. I started my journey from there to here being afraid of the dark. In order to deal with that fear, you either have to go into the dark, turn on the light or find somebody to go with you.

I have been going through the Gospel of Thomas to help shape these talks.

In her book, “The Meaning of Mary Magdalene,” Cynthia Bourgeault writes:

“The single most important thing Christianity could do to completely renew itself would be to reclaim the Gospel of Thomas on an equal footing with the present canonical gospels for liturgical use, study and sacred proclamation. It would completely revolutionize our understanding of the religion we think we know so well.”

For one thing this might help break the virtual death hold the notion of “exclusivity” has on many who call themselves Christians. There is what philosophers have called “the perennial tradition” that has been true since the beginning of time. If something is true, it is true always and everywhere.

You have likely seen the timeline popularized by Carl Sagan and updated by Neil DeGrasse Tyson, whom I quoted earlier, where the entire 13.8 billion year history of the cosmos is reduced to a single year. The Big Bang occurs on January 1. (Here

is a link to one such article [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic\\_Calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_Calendar) ) The first life of any kind doesn't appear until September 21. Simple animals appear December 14. Mammals appear December 26. We don't discover fire until 11:44 on December 31st. The first writing takes place at 11:59.47. Buddha comes along at 11:59:54 and Jesus shows up at 11:49:55. The moon landing took place at 11:59:59.5. Carl Sagan said that if all of the Cosmic Calendar were scaled to the size of a football field, all of human history would be the width of his hand. Yet there are people who still believe in a twenty-four-hour, seven-day creation story and that God, depicted as a white guy off sitting somewhere, waited until Jesus to say anything of significance to the human race. Actually, what I was taught is that God waited until there were Baptists in the Southern part of the United States.

We need a wisdom tradition that is big enough to take it all in. Jesus is part of that tradition and speaks out of it. To be sure, the Gospel of Thomas is a product of its own time but when approached by listening with the ear of the heart, - the kind of hearing Jesus meant when he said, "If you have ears, use them." - these teachings hold their own with the best of universal transformative wisdom.

Another reason for using the Gospel of Thomas is that it helps us avoid focusing on a religion about Jesus and moves us more directly into the religion of Jesus. By the fourth century Christianity had become a matter of believing things rather than actually waking up and walking a path of transformation. I think this is particularly good news for those who have been burdened with a guilt-ridden Christianity.

The Gospel of Thomas is also full of practices for us to undertake. As we go along, you will encounter these: mindfulness, presence, awakening, attention, vigilance, letting go. Thomas is a "doing" gospel. It is full of helpful, if challenging, teachings that open the door to non-dual mind and living. It is this non-duality that is required to enter into the realm of reality Jesus teaches about. Belief alone won't get anyone to oneness. As we are going to see from the teaching today it is two-ness - the opposite of the singularity Jesus teaches about in Thomas - it is two-ness that allows exclusivity, judgment, intolerance and even violence to exist. Those are the things that have sabotaged Jesus' universal message of love.

We are working on making a shift here and for many it is a powerful one. It is a shift from "believing in" to "digging in."



By the way next week I want to talk, among other things, about two matters that are of importance.

One is the role of tradition and/or sacred texts in all wise and useful religions. The other are some of the specific practices you might consider that would enhance the likelihood of opening the door to non-dual mind.

If you get a copy of the Gospel of Thomas, and you can download one free from the internet, you'll find that the teachings or sayings in the Gospel of Thomas are called "logions" and each is given a number. The word "logion" is simply a diminutive of the Greek word "logos" which means "word." "Logion" is the word biblical scholars use to designate a teaching of Jesus but it is also used to reference any teaching by a spiritual teacher.

Today we are up to Logion 11. Here it is:

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The sky and all that lies in the  
dimensions above it will cease to exist.  
The dead know nothing of life,  
and the living will never die.  
When you consume that which is already  
dead, you are turning it back into life.  
So, then, when you too emerge  
back into the Light,  
what will you do?  
For on the day when you  
were created one,  
you also became two,  
but when you come to realize your  
twoness again,  
what will you do?

\* \* \*

(The meaning of this teaching is so apparent I hesitate to comment on it. :) )

The sayings in the Gospel of Thomas are not in any particular order. This isn't a narrative like the gospels most people are familiar with where Jesus gets born, or begins his ministry, and then the narrative tells the story of his life and teachings that lead to his death and resurrection. However, the saying right before this is one where Jesus says, "I have cast fire on the earth. I am patient. I will wait until the fire blazes."

My interpretation of that teaching is that the fire is us. Jesus waits for those who have received his teaching to be transformed so that they, we, can be transforming agents on the earth.

What does this teaching mean?

Let me begin to get at one understanding of it by giving you a test. Fill in the blank: Jesus was a \_\_\_\_\_ mystic.

The answer is: Jesus was a Jewish mystic.

Richard Rohr says that Jesus is the first teacher of non-dual consciousness the West has ever seen. Cynthia Bourgeault refers to Jesus as "the master cardiologist" who is in the lineage of the prophet Ezekiel who said, "I will give you a new heart, put a new spirit in you. I'll remove the stone heart from your body and replace it with a heart that's God-willed, not self-willed." (Ezekiel 36:26.)

I believe that the teachings of Jesus are as revolutionary today as they were in his own time - and just as misheard. G. K. Chesterson, the British humorist, once quipped, "Christianity isn't a failure; it just hasn't been tried yet."

The relevance of Jesus being a Jewish mystic, for all of his teachings but especially this one, is that without a Jewish lens through which to look, we don't have a chance of understanding this teaching.

One of the first teachings from the Gospel of Thomas we encountered was this:

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A person of advanced age  
must go immediately and  
ask an infant born just  
seven days about life's source.  
Such asking leads to life  
when what is first becomes last.  
United they become a single whole.

\* \* \*

Notice again the emphasis on singleness.

The seven days refers to the seven days of creation in the creation myth and this was a Jewish aphorism for Rest.

So this saying we are looking at today, which is not given to logical interpretation, also embraces the creation myth. When, in the earliest creation stories, the human was created the human was one, single. Then division came. The word "devil" has a root meaning of "to throw apart," "to split."

Jesus never taught anything about getting it right. What Jesus taught was all about staying connected, not being fragmented, being whole. One of the ways Jesus taught about singularity was by putting things together no one expected: "Blessed are - the poor." "Love - your enemy." "Daddy - your name be holy."

While I was working on this talk I got found by a, to me, wonderful line by H.L. Mencken. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H. L. Mencken](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._L._Mencken)) Mencken is a quite controversial figure, thought so because of some of his political views. He was also a commentator on the American scene and is thought by many scholars to be the most influential linguist for the first part of the last century. He is the one who, by his satirical reporting on the Scopes trial, gave us the phrase "the monkey trial." The line of his I encountered was this, and it drew me up short:

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Penetrating so many secrets, we cease to believe in the unknowable. But there it sits nevertheless, calmly licking its chops.

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Our post-modern, scientific and rational culture, dualism if you will, seduces us into thinking we know. When in fact we don't. Let me put that another way. It is not that we don't know. It is that we can't say. There are some things you cannot put into words. There are some things you cannot conceptualize. There are some things you can only stand mutely in front of and gape in awe. The things that fall into this category are: love, death, suffering, God, infinity.

You cannot explain your irrational love for your children or your partner.

When we come to talk about method a bit next week I hope to take another step in the direction of enabling us to be at home on the spiritual, mystical path. It is a path where we have to be willing to be perplexed. These teachings are meant to create a dilemma where the choice is either to walk away from it because the cost of embracing it is too high for the ego, or to embrace it and take another step into non-duality. Most people have very little patience with mystery.

Mysticism doesn't mean something "misty" that is available to a select few. It means "an experiential knowledge of the spiritual."

Where organized religion has hurt is by telling people not to trust this inner knowing. Organized religion has wanted people to trust the bucket rather than the water that is in the bucket. In Christianity Roman Catholics were told to trust the hierarchy and Protestants were told to trust the Bible. See where that has gotten us?

What it has created is either passive or aggressive people and groups. Or, even sadder, a lot of people who have concluded there is no Sacred Mystery to experience.

Contrast that with Jesus who said to people what I want to say to you now: “Go in peace. Your faith has made you whole.”

He said that to people who had made no dogmatic affirmations, who did not think he was “God,” who did not pass a moral checklist, and who did not belong to the right group. They were simply people who trustfully affirmed, with open hearts, the grace of their own hungry experience of being embraced by and made one with Sacred Mystery. May we all have such faith and experience.

I’m learning to think of it this way: May we be willing to be made one with ourselves, with each other and with Sacred Mystery by being willing to be Divinely Entangled.

Go in peace. Your faith has made you whole.

No matter where you go this week, no matter what happens, remember this: you carry precious cargo. So, watch your step.