

Love and the Near Life Experience

Dr. Andrew Powell

Introduction

'I have estimated the influence of Reason upon Love and found that it is like that of a raindrop upon the ocean, which makes one little mark upon the water's face and disappears.'

Hafiz

On the eternal subject of love, so much has already been written and said by so many. But as a psychiatrist trying to make sense of the pathology of the human psyche, I want to venture some observations concerning its nature and the part it plays in health and illness. For love would seem to be sometimes an antidote to falling ill, and at other times an agent provocateur. Psychiatrists are happy to sanction certain kinds of love - a mother's healthy love for her child, for instance, or 'mature' love between consenting adults. But passionate love is more often looked on as a potential threat. After all, it drives people to behave irrationally, act impulsively and frequently to suffer the painful consequences.

On the one hand, we are instinctively drawn to the platonic values of beauty, truth, goodness and love. They engender a wonderful, intuitive sense of wholeness and fortunately, they show no sign of going away, even in this shabby, post-modern world. Sadly, these values are seriously overlooked in the psychological literature; all the more surprising since losing track of them is undoubtedly a danger to one's mental health.

On the other hand, these values get confused with moral codes set down by human society. Far from leading to wholeness, morality based on a required code of conduct inevitably leads to splitting of the psyche. The clergy have their sex scandals, politicians who are supposed to behave with sobriety get drunk, judges are caught speeding and police take bribes like the criminals they are supposed to be catching. The strain of being good gets to people sooner or later and most of us will at some time have said, under our breath, 'there but for the grace of God, go I'. So, we are forced to admit that in everyday human life, for every expression of beauty there will be found one of ugliness, truth is twinned with falsehood, goodness is the inseparable companion of evil and love is not a million miles from hate.

Soul and Personality

'I was dead, then alive.
Weeping, then laughing.
The power of love came into me,
And I became fierce like a lion
Then tender like the evening star'.

Rumi

Wholeness begets all else. Definitions include 'unbroken', 'intact', 'entire', 'complete' and 'a unity'. This is the language of the soul. All great music, literature and art invariably reflect this transcendent reaching towards the greater whole, being both of the world and going mysteriously beyond.

From where does this impulse arise? The teleological view, expounded by Aristotle, is to see the universe as striving towards its own final cause. Just as the acorn is impelled to become the oak, so there is a design, a purpose and a movement towards completion in all things. In science, too, cosmologists refer nowadays to the anthropic principle, which argues that the chances of the right conditions having emerged to support our human consciousness are so many trillion to one against that consciousness must have been in the grand design from the outset.

Science and spirituality converge in this quest for the whole, the ultimate totality or unity. As Stephen Hawking writes of the search for a Grand Unified Theory, 'If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason – for then we would know the mind of God.'¹

In the meantime, we do have that remarkable instrument of subjectivity, the self, which enables us to access the whole through prayer, contemplation and meditation.² In the Daoist tradition, the source of all is the Wuji, beyond duality, and 'the mother of ten thousand things'.³ In other faiths, God has been conceptualised as the being greater than which none can be conceived, immanent and ineffable; a circle that is without circumference and whose centre is everywhere. Regardless of creed and culture, there is the same longing for union with the Divine, as all rivers flow to the sea.

If we confined ourselves to looking at love in relation to wholeness, what I call soul love,⁴ we would be spared looking into the seamy side of human nature. But journeys generally have to go from A to B, and in the human condition, A is located in the vicissitudes of the struggle for survival, territorial and social dominance, and sexual choice based on the best chances for reproduction of the species, all of which gives love a distinctly selfish character.⁵

This is the hallmark of personality.⁶ The ego is dedicated to maintaining the personality largely through what are known in psychotherapy as defence mechanisms. There are a number of these but the one I want to mention here is called projective identification. Emotions that are felt to be dangerous to the personality are split off without being acknowledged as belonging to oneself, and instead get projected into others – individuals, groups and nations.

Projective identification allows for a sense of virtue and goodness since the fault invariably lies with the other. Group cohesion is strengthened. Nations go to war and pray to God for victory. The war against terrorism is a case in point - the states of America may have become the more united, but the world is the more divided.

We have, then, a strange disjunction between the peace and wholeness that the human soul yearns for, and the behaviour of human personality, which is riddled with factions, splits and dualities of every imaginable kind.

Fear of Life

‘Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do children as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing’.

Helen Keller

Let us look at the fate of the child born into such a world as ours. Every infant begins life suffused with soul consciousness, innocent and wondrous.⁷ As long as it is centre of the universe, which in every happy home it does for a while feel itself to be, joy and delight prevail. But then, with the advancing complexity of its social relationships, comes the painful recognition that others hold themselves to be just as important as oneself, others who have no great interest in your welfare and rather more power, and so the struggle for survival begins. The human ego is the means to personal survival in a world that is largely indifferent to one’s fate.

Now a path is determined which will shape the rest of things to come. I want to convey something of the fundamental choice that besets every human being. It is whether to risk engagement in the struggle for life, or whether to withdraw from the field of battle.

This should not be confused with the universal need for privacy of the self, the interiority that every human psyche needs in order to function. No one can stay on the battlefield all the time – terminal exhaustion would soon set in. I am talking here about those cases when the decision is born out of unendurable pain, depriving a person of any sense of choice whether, when and how to engage in the field of action.

Deep exploration of such withdrawal reveals that behind the fear to love is greater fear of losing the one you love. The desire and need to love is hardwired into the psyche and only the emotional pain of abandonment will persuade us to give up love. Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote ‘Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all’. But this sentiment is for the brave. The vulnerable psyche says rather, ‘Better not to have loved than to lose’ for losing is felt to be like cutting off the oxygen supply. So for the fainthearted, the task is to learn how to live without oxygen, like an anaerobic organism.

Death by Degrees

No one ever said on his deathbed,
‘I wished I’d spent more time in the office’.

Un-attributed aphorism

It is an extraordinary irony that to engage fully with life means at the same time to wrestle with death. That which we most fear is that which brings our attention to life. Samuel Johnson famously wrote, ‘The realisation that one is to be hanged in the morning concentrates the mind wonderfully’.

Death comes in a thousand guises, making its first appearance in the very celebration of birth, as enshrined in the lore of many fairy tales. The bad witch arrives uninvited and casts a spell over the innocent babe. The witch represents the return of the Shadow, that cannot and will not be banished, and against which the most powerful ego is helpless. No castle wall or principality can resist the return of the repressed. So, there follows no end of suffering and then the dying by degrees. But in fairy tales at least, there is always a resurrection initiated by love, or a prince's kiss, which raises consciousness to a new height.

The outcome is less assured in the real world. The child who has not been loved sufficiently to cope with the battleground of life must turn away in order to find refuge. Survival, as opposed to living, is now the objective. This instinct is so powerful that in the worst case, a child can be made to do just about anything to stay alive. Children abducted by guerrillas, for example, soon become as brutal as their captors. To show, or indeed, to feel sensitivity is to risk being killed. This is the dynamic of all scapegoating; a child showing fear becomes a vessel for the denied, split off and projected vulnerabilities of the others. Then that vulnerable child must be destroyed so that everybody else can feel magically rid of his or her own weakness. This is what lies behind the brutality of sociopathic behaviour.

In less extreme circumstances, a more usual development is that of the false self, which functions to minimise the threat of loss. When not emotionally engaged, such a person appears to be independent and self-reliant. But when the yearning for relationships is kindled and there is the prospect of intimacy, the signs are all suggestive of the underlying anxious attachment. Feelings of insecurity, jealousy and unrealistic expectations of the availability of the other break surface. Unless the problem is tackled, the crescendo of mental pain will result in the person abruptly breaking the tie and reverting to a state of familiar, but safe, loneliness.

Such people are sometimes called schizoid because they evince so few signs of emotion. But still waters run deep. When the detachment defences do break down, there can be a fierce attack on the loved one or serious self-harm. I remember one patient who stood in front of his wife in the kitchen, stabbing himself in the chest and abdomen and collapsing in a pool of blood. He survived after heroic surgery. The couple came to see me together. The wife knew that now she could never leave, for his blood would be always on her hands.

Another man nearly succeeded in strangling his wife. But it wasn't just fear that kept her with him thereafter. In feeling the full violence of his jealous love, she could get in touch vicariously with a depth of passion that she was too frightened to own for herself.

The Emotion of Love

'My life has been filled with terrible misfortunes
– most of which never happened'.

Mark Twain

Western depth psychology has elaborated a comprehensive model of early emotional development. We understand a great deal about how the infant internalises the goodness of the caregiver, from the first successful feed at the breast, so that the emerging self can be experienced as essentially good. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised.

The baby also has to learn to withstand pain and frustration, initially in the body and then in its rapidly forming mind. It must organise what is termed its inner object world, in which loving and hateful impulses co-exist. To begin with, they are widely split, but with good parenting, integration of the contents of the child's inner world is achieved. The child develops the healthy capacity to hold ambivalent feelings towards the one and same other, essential if future relationships are to survive the storms of life.

Much psychoanalytical theory is concerned with the outcome of this integration, which leads to the capacity to be able to experience genuine concern for the other, even when one's own needs are not being gratified. Our relationships can then be reflective rather than impulse driven.

The way is paved for the triangular constellation of father, mother and child, with all the emotional challenges that follow. In the good-enough family, there is the chance to witness the exchange of love between the parents and to discover the pleasure of loving, rather than being possessed of the need for love. The yin and yang of motherly love and fatherly love, can be tried, tested and internalised as attributes of the self.

For the secure child, engaging with siblings and then the wider world leads to the realisation that more can be achieved by cooperation, working with the group, than going it alone. The emergent young person is getting ready to step into their parents' shoes and form their own family. Nature arranges the necessary pair bonding through the experience of falling in love. Later will come the trials and tribulations of parental love, in which we are challenged to love our children non-possessively, lest we burden them with our expectations.

So let us summarise some of the varieties of love within the compass of the human psyche.⁸ There is motherly love, which as the positive archetype offers love bountifully and unconditionally - the munificent breast - and instils the feeling that it is good to have been born and to be alive. In the negative, it is the devouring and swallowing Kali that traps and overwhelms the child in the name of love. Then there is fatherly love, which as a positive archetype takes the child into the world and encourages the child to accomplish great things. Yet in its negative aspect, the father archetype is painfully conditional, withholding and punishing, if the will of the father is opposed.

From the best of motherly and fatherly love arises self-love, the joy in being oneself. This is not to be confused with selfishness. Selfishness, which may look like self-love, is in fact the opposite. It is a desperate attempt to fill a void empty of love.

Self-love means to love all of humanity. Take the second commandment, which Jesus singled out for special mention, that 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Matthew 22: v. 39). The psychology of child development has shown without doubt that if we cannot love ourselves we can love no other. This is the source of brotherly love, exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The love that Nature bestows to ensure our survival as a species is called Eros, the desire to merge with a chosen other, leading to sexual union. The existential angst of aloneness is assuaged, temporarily at least. Yet the fate of falling in love is to fall out of love, unless that love is based on giving rather than taking.

Finally, for those who have escaped the fate of neurosis, there is love as mature inter-dependence, a life-enriching concern with, and care for, the chosen other.

In secular psychology, these kinds of love are more or less the best that can be expected of an ordinary man or woman. Love is geared to the protection of self and family, and by extension, to the social community. But what of spiritual love? What are we to make of Jesus' exhortation, 'love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also'. (Luke 6: v. 27-29) Jesus then drives the point home, 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?' (v. 33).

Here, psychological theory is obliged to make do with debating the nature of altruism and whether it must be ultimately self-serving. Or else we might speak of manic-defence, the reaction by means of which the ego fends off depression, or of mental illness like hypomania, when due to a neurochemical imbalance the self has become pathologically expansive. This is all because the Western view of love is generally limited to ego functioning concerned with self-survival. Even when a parent dies in a fire rescuing his child, this is understood to be not so different, since the ego is invested in the survival of one's own flesh and blood.

What do we mean by Love?

'I lost myself. Forgot myself.
I lay my face against the Beloved's face.
Everything fell away and I left myself behind,
Abandoning my care
Among the lilies, forgotten'.

John of the Cross

This all makes it hard to know what a person means when they say 'I love you'. Are there strings attached – 'I'll love you if you love me?' Does it mean 'I need you in order to feel good/secure/valued?' And what of the ambivalence of love and hate? Young couples courting in China kiss and say tenderly to each other 'I hate you!' Sometimes people hesitate to speak of love because it is supposed to be all sweetness and light, yet they know there is a dark side to it. Perhaps it would be liberating if we could say in the same breath to our nearest and dearest, 'I love you and I hate you'.

Now compare these paroxysms of emotion driven by the need to maintain insecure and shaky attachments with the kind of love that overflows from a generous and compassionate heart. When love is concerned with giving rather than taking, far from clinging to another, there is a deep recognition of the sovereignty of the other. The desire is not to hold on but to set free. Such love puts first what is best for the other. This is exceptionally

striking when we see it at work in spiritual masters like Buddha and Christ. The needs of the ego have been set aside and when this has been truly accomplished there is nothing to fear. For what is there left to take away? Ultimately, there is only a person's physical life and for a spiritual master, this is of little consequence. As Jesus said, 'for whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world but lose his own soul?' (Matthew 16: v. 25 -26)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who opposed Hitler, and who was hanged by the Nazis in 1945 after two years in Buchenwald, is reported to have said during his interrogation by the Gestapo, 'you can take everything from me but that which is most precious - my soul'. And when finally he was summoned to be hanged, Bonhoeffer quietly turned to his friends in the prison and said, 'this is the end – for me the beginning of life'.⁹

Most of us fortunately are spared the kind of ordeal that would test us to the limit, and so we cannot know the measure of our own spiritual fortitude. But such courage and selflessness suggests that we are no longer dealing with a mere emotion, for this is love that transcends the dualities of emotional life. It would appear to have a different source and a different consequence entirely. I am going to argue that such love in its entirety is far more than an emotion, that it is the energy of consciousness. We can be helped in our understanding of this by turning to a schema that had its origins in the East long before Western civilisation was even a twinkle in the eye of its creator.

The Chakras

'Our spiritual design is as anatomically complex and well ordered as our biological design...the embodiment of eternity'.

Caroline Myss Anatomy of the Spirit

I am going to be discussing the chakras, a concept pivotal to the ancient Ayurvedic healing tradition and over five thousand years old. Their importance as psychological archetypes holds true regardless of scientific proof of the subtle energies being postulated,¹⁰ or of their hypothesised relationship to the autonomic nervous system.

The word chakra comes from the Sanskrit for 'wheel', symbolising a whirling vortex that draws in the subtle energy of the universal energy field (or 'prana') and transmutes the energy into a form that can be utilised by the human organism.

There are seven main chakras located in the mid-line. They lie along a spinal meridian known as the sushumna, as well as being linked by two collateral channels, the ida and pingula. The chakras represent foci of high intensity energy, influencing both psychic and bodily functioning. In the language of information theory, they have been described as energy data banks. In health all the chakras are open, balanced and with no obstruction to the free flow of energy. Just as Daoism asserts that the rightful place of the human being is to span earth and heaven, so too do the chakras span body, mind and spirit.

Each chakra powers a layer of the aura, or human energy field.¹¹ The aura encompasses and interpenetrates every cell of the body and radiates outwards from the human body as an energetic standing wave. (The Buddha was said to have an aura a mile wide). The aura is unbounded, in that as it extends away from the physical body, it becomes confluent with the universal energy field.

Experiments have shown that we are extraordinarily sensitive to each other's energy fields.¹² Jesus instantly perceived the touch on his cloak of the woman healed of a blood disorder, 'immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him' (Mark 5: v. 25 - 34) and hands-on spiritual healing is carried out through making subtle adjustments to the aura and chakras.

We can understand each chakra to represent an energetic differentiation of consciousness, just as white light refracts into the colours of the rainbow. Indeed, it is no coincidence that colours are commonly ascribed to the chakras as perceived clairvoyantly, going from red (the first or root chakra) through orange (the sacral or second), yellow (the solar plexus or third), green (the heart or fourth), blue (the throat or fifth), indigo (the brow or sixth) to violet/white (for the crown or seventh chakra).

The energy of Muladhara, the root chakra, serves basic survival and forms the foundation for everything to follow. This is the condition of the newborn, emerging into physical reality. Boundaries are not recognised, for the individual and the ground of all being are as yet undifferentiated. The first task is to anchor the self in physical reality.

Svadhistana, the sacral chakra, establishes the child's self-boundary, still relatively permeable so that wish-fulfilment and fantasy predominate. As the ego grows, the pull of the ground weakens and mind and body differentiate. Dualities arise and the emotions are born. Mental function is still concrete and pre-conceptual. The energy of this chakra becomes genitally and sexually orientated at puberty, when the emotion of desire, still perfused with fantasy, is linked to the longing for sexual union.

Manipura, the solar plexus chakra, is the one furthest removed from the ground of all being. It mediates the consensus reality on which society is based, a world of archetypal relationships driven and characterised by dominance, submission and manipulation, the hallmarks of ego-based love. The mental and physical domains are widely split; on the one hand we have the abstract reasoning of conceptual mind and on the other, the material world of Newtonian spacetime.

Anahata, the heart chakra, is poised midway between the lower and the upper chakras. It is the first to express spirituality. The ego gives way to a concern with all humanity - the greater the suffering, the deeper the compassion. Responding to the pain of others without resentment or aversion is the basis of empathy. The heart chakra represents inner abundance and universal love, powerfully represented by the Christ archetype.

Vishuddha, the throat chakra, communicates spiritual will. It is the province of the Higher Self, in which self and the spiritual ground become permeable to each other. There is surrender to divine consciousness, endowing grace, creativity and intuition, and detachment from earthly goals, characteristic of the Buddha archetype. It rests on the experience of knowing as opposed to believing, in gnosis not faith. 'I am that I am' (Exodus 3: v.14).

The fifth chakra is concerned with communicating this revelation, be it through spiritual teachings, music, art or the highest scientific vision.

Ajna, the brow chakra, sometimes known as the third eye, is the portal of the sixth sense opening into the spiritual ground. Ordinary consciousness is transcended and there is access to universal knowledge beyond space-time. Other-dimensional realities confer extrasensory powers. Consciousness is no longer experienced as arising from the self. There is unitive insight into the true nature of all things. It is the summit of soul attainment.

Sahasrara, the crown chakra, marks the return of the self to the Source. All self-boundaries are shed and there is total merging with the unity of spirit. Subject and object no longer exist and nor do space and time. Emotions dissolve into a state of is-ness, often described as perfect peace. All is one, as found in states of enlightenment or samadhi.

In Western psychology, borne out of nineteenth century materialism, there is a very limited acknowledgement of fifth chakra consciousness. Worse still, the equivalents of sixth and seventh chakra consciousness are not described, except as typifying either religious or pathological altered states of consciousness. To make any sense of chakras six and seven, we have to turn Eastwards, to the home of paradoxical logic. In China it is said that 'he who knows the Dao does not care to speak about it; he who speaks about it does not know it'.

If we work upwards from first to the fourth chakra, we find a broad correspondence with Western developmental psychology. The child is father to the man, and the secure, happy child will result in a confident and stable adult. Each consecutive chakra needs to be fully awakened, so that as we move from ego-based concerns towards the spiritual aspect of life, we can do so with a firm foundation, as outlined earlier in this paper. Incidentally, Sigmund Freud's contribution was mainly in the areas of chakras one, two and three, while Carl Jung's was essentially to focus on the movement from chakras three and four onwards, which he called the individuation process.

A good deal of confusion arises when not realising that the lower chakras have to do with personality and the upper ones with soul. For instance, the undifferentiated nature of the first chakra, the 'no-self' of the newborn, looks at first sight not unlike the mystical union of the seventh chakra with the spiritual ground. Similarly, the second chakra, where there is only partial differentiation between self and ground, may appear to be much like the sixth chakra, in which the limits of spacetime are regularly transcended. The third chakra, characterised by the striving of the ego for attainment, may be likened to the fifth chakra, where there is an outpouring of creativity and will. Yet in each case there is a crucial difference.

The difference lies in the relationship of earth to heaven. The first two chakras are emergent from the ground of all being. Our personalities are forming and being prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. With the separation of personality from the spiritual ground in the third chakra, we are pitched headlong into the furor of life, to make of it what we can. Then, with the opening of the heart chakra, we begin the journey home. The meaning of love profoundly changes, and thereafter, the progression is towards a return to spirit.

Ken Wilbur calls this mis-identification of lower and upper chakras the 'pre/trans fallacy'¹³ since the lower chakras are implicated in pre-rational

consciousness, while the upper ones are trans-rational. There is the world of difference between the mystic who purposefully opens to the higher chakras and someone with a poorly integrated personality being flooded by an intrusion of higher chakra consciousness. In such cases, merging with the Divine may result in religious delusions, or extra-sensory experiences that can lead to schizophrenic type reactions.

Varieties of Love

'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a clanging gong. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all knowledge: and if I have faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing'.

1 Corinthians 13: v. 1-2

The nature of first chakra love is entirely needs driven, dedicated in the first instance to the infant's survival through ingesting milk from the breast, and then all the motherly love the milk represents. It is the source of ontological security, the love of life, which is established through the rhythm and harmony of feeding on demand.

In the 1930s, the behaviourist Truby King argued that early training could impose desirable behaviour on children and brainwashed mothers never to go to the baby except for a four-hourly feed, lest it ruin the baby's 'independence'! The consequences are being felt to this day. Other disturbances of the early child-mother relationship impair the function of the first chakra, leading at best to a failure to feel 'grounded' in the body, and at worst, a vulnerability to later psychosis with regression to oral, alimentary and anal needs.

Second chakra love is impulsive, fantasy laden and vibrant with emotion. First making itself known in the toddler, it is passionate, unbridled and when frustrated, characterised by moodiness and tantrums. The teenage years are dominated by this chakra, idealistic, sexualised and, when flowing freely, highly expressive of the young person's emerging individuality. It is love of a still immature kind, which says 'I love *because* I am loved. I love you *because* I need you'. Its volatile, erotic nature makes it essential that first chakra love has been securely accomplished. Then the capacity for stable self-love will be assured.

When this is lacking, pathology is frequently borderline psychotic, with hallucinations and sometimes Kundalini type experiences. Alternatively, the failure of integration of the self may lead to dissociative disorders. Other distortions generate the whole gamut of neuroses, not least in the psychosexual arena.

Love in the third chakra is caught between the altruism of the fourth, heart chakra and the self-absorption of the second chakra. Not surprisingly, it is conflict ridden, as the ego struggles to cope with the demands of physical and mental maturation. Frustrations kindle anger, insecurities breed jealousy and rivalry and the capacity of the personality to handle ambivalence is tested to the limit. But in the case of a good outcome, the influence of the fourth chakra awakens the third chakra to love in the service of adult relationships,

family and community, while the energy of the second chakra is, in turn, harnessed to mature sexuality.

On the other hand, disturbances of the third chakra often lead to the loss of control over alcohol, food, drugs or sex, behaviours which are attempts to quell feelings of emptiness or loss arising from the disappointment of not finding love.

The fourth or heart chakra holds the key to humankind's evolutionary potential. From here on, the meaning of love undergoes a profound change. Up to this point, love has been an emotion, participating like everything else in the world of dualities. The negative pole of such love is fear. This has to be so, because the lower chakras are implicated in the development of ego and wherever personality is identified with love, there are longings and attachments, inevitably bringing the fear of loss.

Now, with the fourth chakra comes the first stage of the dissolution of ego and the transcending of personality. The Good Samaritan thinks only of how he can help - he has no regard for himself.

Western psychology argues that surely the negative must always be in there somewhere, either repressed, or split off and projected as I described earlier in the case of projective identification. But the esoteric view is that the human being is now awakening to the primary nature of love as energy. Since consciousness is no longer a personal possession, neither is duality a feature of personal psyche. The 'negative', if one goes looking for it, will be found elsewhere, in accordance with the yin and yang of the cosmos. On our planet, it is endlessly dramatised in the conflicts of society and nationhood. In the realm of matter (where it makes more sense to speak of the cycle of creation and destruction), we see it on a grand scale in the birth and death of the supernova.

Because the heart brings openness to spirit, there is no longer the same protection to the psyche afforded by the ego defences of the lower chakras. This can lead to serious energetic imbalances, for instance, when the heart chakra is wide open in someone who is not mature enough to cope with the inflow of pain, and who instead of transforming pain into the act of healing, as in the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Tonglen,¹⁴ falls ill. It is essential that the lower chakras are fully developed and engaged. The Gospels make it quite clear that there was nothing etherialised or 'ungrounded' about Jesus.

The fifth chakra is the seat of what is sometimes called 'the higher self'. Love in this chakra is dispassionate, having a detachment from the drama of human affairs. As with the third chakra, there is a powerful striving for realisation of the archetypes but now purely in the spiritual ambit of expressing one's highest truth. Great stability is required, for the inflow from spirit can overwhelm the personality and activate a regression to second chakra levels, causing the spiritual ground to become laden with projections. These are often persecutory, setting the stage for a breakdown.

Love at the level of the sixth chakra is essentially detached from the human sphere altogether. This is not a defensive detachment. It is simply that there is profound absorption in the nature of ultimate reality that transcends birth and death. Going beyond the bounds of spacetime, this is the realm of extrasensory phenomena or siddhis. Only adepts or practitioners of spiritual disciplines such as yoga or qigong can regularly function with safety at this

level. Yet many people, possibly up to one third, have occasional and transient breakthroughs to this kind of direct experience, especially when the busy mind is stilled.

The language of the seventh chakra is silence; there are no words here. Love is itself transcended. We are at the limit of consciousness of the humanly incarnated soul. Just as the base chakra is the starting point for the emergence of the human being from the spiritual ground, so the crown chakra is the place of return.

This chakra has been likened to the seventh note of the scale, which leads on to the octave. Some clairvoyants perceive an eighth chakra, about eighteen inches above the crown of the head. As musicians know, octaves sound the same note, but having the frequency of the sound wave doubling with each rising octave. In a multi-dimensional universe structured on holographic lines, the seventh chakra would take us to the keynote of the next octave, one doubtless to be experienced in other times and places than ours.

The Near Life Experience

'...And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time'

T.S.Eliot Little Gidding

Much has been written about the near death experience. Yet every psychiatrist is confronted daily with people not living but surviving. I have observed that the fear of dying is directly proportional to the sense of not having lived. The psyche knows that there is a real danger of missing the boat.

Much esoteric teaching emphasises that the human soul incarnates in order to face the adversities of life, all of which serve to spur the development of the soul. This life is but one stop on an infinite journey. It is, nevertheless, an important one, or it would not have been arranged thus. Yet the impact of trauma can cause a person to recoil from life and take refuge behind the barricade of ego-defences.

We know from survivors of the near death experience that the extraordinary immersion in love that they feel when going into the light transforms them for the remainder of their days.¹⁵ They come back knowing that the single most important purpose of life is to love. Yet while most of us glimpse this from time to time (and falling in love is such a glimpse) our consciousness is largely geared to the mundane business of personal and emotional survival.

The great advantage of looking at love in relation to the chakras is that we can see perfection in the design. Here we find a hierarchy of needs, which takes the human soul from earth to heaven. This need not be a matter of waiting for the resurrection. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, when asked about the kingdom to come, 'It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here it is', or 'Look, there it is'. Rather, the father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth and people do not see it'.¹⁶

In accepting the nature of love at the level of each chakra, we are spared expecting or demanding anything beyond that which is securely in place. Rather, we can see how the journey through life is designed to allow for the unfolding of the psyche in its search for self-realisation.

Psychotherapy and the Chakras

Take hold tightly; let go lightly.

This is one of the great secrets of felicity in love.

Alfred Orage 'On Love'

This paper offers a map linking Western and Eastern conceptualisations of love and leaving only enough space for a passing reference to therapeutic principles.

To begin with, no chakra should be seen as more important than any other; use of the terms 'lower' and 'higher' is merely a descriptive device.

First chakra love is the foundation of life, and therapy must honour the emergence of the self from the ground. The therapist needs to have the capacity to attune to the infant soul, for if this chakra is blocked there will have been a failure to incarnate fully. The life force is found to be impoverished, and there is profound insecurity. Freeing a blocked first chakra calls for unconditional love and an appreciation of the importance of grounding with mother earth.

Second chakra love is demanding and needy. It requires recognising and indulging; otherwise act-hunger will persist and sabotage later work. But the appetite has to be satisfied with symbolic nourishment, since the therapist is in no position to become either parent or lover.

The hallmark of love in the third chakra is the struggle of opposites; between greed and generosity, envy and gratitude, kindness and spite, dominance and submission, love and hate. Here the Shadow reigns supreme. The task is not just to accept one's Shadow but to learn to love one's Shadow. It means that no matter how intensely shameful and unworthy the contents of the Shadow are felt to be, they must be embraced wholeheartedly. This is where the fourth chakra comes in.

People who live by rigid moral precepts often fear exposure – they are their own worst critics. But there is a surprising discovery ahead. Instead of releasing a monster, the wholeness that begins to be experienced puts the person in touch with the emotional world of others. Then forbearance and consideration come naturally, not because of the imperatives of a harsh super-ego but because of a greater sensitivity. Through knowing one's Shadow, a person is more tolerant and less quick to judge. Someone who goes in for projective identification and so habitually finds fault with others is the one most likely to be afraid of being judged – impossible then to live with love. So here is the chance for integration of split-off parts of the self and for a healing of the wounded soul

The move from the third to the fourth chakra is the hardest for most people to make because the dynamics are so contradictory. Opening the fourth chakra means moving beyond 'I love you *because* I need you' to 'I need you *because* I love you'. Fourth chakra love is unlimited and all-inclusive. For

a person to overcome their ego needs and to let their beloved go free is an act of enormous trust. Deep fears of rejection and loss have to be faced, for the self desperately wants to come first before all others. It is one thing knowing that the law of the cosmos will ensure that in its own time and place love freely offered returns tenfold; it is quite another to hold to that truth when the heart is bleeding from the wounds of third chakra love.

Many people live their lives immersed in the consumer culture of 'me, me, me', without ever opening to the fourth chakra. Yet such a life is devoid of real fulfilment and no amount of Prozac will cure the depression that arises as a symptom of inhibition of the human soul.

Other times, we may see upper chakra love seriously out of balance when disconnected from the lower chakras, as happens when people 'spiritualise' themselves to escape from second and third chakra love. The self can become ungrounded and dangerously inflated. In contrast, true spiritual attainment will be characterised by humility, the best sign of a well-tempered and mature personality.

For the purposes of this discussion, I am taking fifth, sixth and seventh chakra love together because they present increasing refinements of the vibration of purely spiritual love. But rather than regarding them as altered states of consciousness, why not speak of alternative states of consciousness, ones that have inspired the world's greatest religious, spiritual and shamanic traditions?

Beyond Life and Death

I am a flame of fire, blazing with passionate love;
I am a spark of light, illuminating the deepest truth;
I am a rough ocean, heaving with righteous anger;
I am a calm lake, comforting the troubled breast;
I am a wild storm, raging at human sins;
I am a gentle breeze, glowing hope in the saddened heart;
I am dry dust, choking worldly ambition;
I am wet earth, bearing rich fruits of grace.

The Black Book of Carmarthan

It might sound as though I have been advocating an orderly progression up through the chakras, like climbing the rungs of a ladder. There is some heuristic value to this but all the chakras are intrinsic to the embodied psyche. The balance they strike is not just a function of the developmental life task but also reflects the nature of the incoming soul. We arrive with different agendas and the tasks facing us are unique to our spiritual history. While all rivers must flow to the sea, each river takes its own course. The important thing is not to get snagged on an obstruction and fear of life is one sure way to get stuck. It is a great irony that fear of life is also fear of death, while to embrace life is to prepare for the embrace of death.

As the river widens and we approach the unlimited ocean of consciousness, the upper chakras prepare us to take leave of the ego. Our egos usually get a bad press, yet without them we could hardly stay afloat

while making our way down the river of life. And to the extent that we have been able to love wholeheartedly, we can plunge joyously and fearlessly into the ocean that awaits.

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