

Transformation

There is an apple tree outside my office in Los Altos. It is an extraordinarily beautiful tree. My office is on the second story and when I go out onto the balcony, I am on a level with the branches of this beautiful tree. I have been in this office about ten years and the apple tree has been there probably 60 or 70 years. During the course of the year, I watch it in fascination. Two months ago it was a gnarled stump, leafless and apparently lifeless. About five weeks ago the most beautiful semi-diaphanous little pink flowers began to appear on it. Over the course of the last two weeks these petals have begun to fall off and carpet the whole area with a pink sheen. In their place are beautiful bright green leaflets. I know that in two or three months time they will turn brown and eventually fall off and once again I will be looking at an old gnarled apple tree. I have watched this cycle for ten years.

Three years ago it really got my attention because in the winter and spring of that year I was doing house calls from my office to a man whom I will call Richard who was dying of a brain tumor. As he was dying over the course of three months, his face was becoming terribly disfigured and gnarled like the old apple tree. His brain function was deteriorating and he was beginning to hallucinate and talk strangely and was unable to remember his words. I watched his progress as I watched the tree.

I remember one day in March 1997, I had a visit with him in the morning and then in the afternoon, I was meeting a friend whose daughter is an ice skater, a beautiful little girl. She reminded me of the pink apple blossoms that were the texture of her skin and the elegance of the way she walked. I began to think of the cycle of the apple tree. It seemed as if Richard represented the winter apple tree, with its gnarled, lifeless and disfigured bark and it seemed as if this little girl was the pink apple blossom.

I came to the realization, in some sense that they are just roles. All of them are artifacts of these spacesuits that we wear. Deep down hidden in the core of Richard as is hidden inside this little girl is pure spirit, the presence of God. We cycle through these different aspects sometimes looking young and beautiful and sometimes looking old, wrinkled and dying. But that is just an artifact of the spacesuit. At the core there is only God and the image of God.

I want to start with that story and I want to talk about the notion of resurrection. I am going to make four main points. Firstly, I am going to ask myself the question, "Who in God's name do you really think you are?" Secondly, I am going to ask the question, "What do you mean he rose from the dead?" Thirdly, I am going to ask the question, "How quick is a flash?" Then fourthly, I'm going to talk about what I call, "Falling in love and rising in love."

Firstly, I ask myself the question, "Who in God's name do you really think you are?" I am going back to my ubiquitous apple tree. I am going to talk about apples. To quote a very beautiful Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, "There is no such thing as an apple or an apple tree. Everything 'inter-is' with every thing else. There is no such thing as an apple existing in its own right. An apple is the sum of fire, earth, air, and water." An apple does not exist without the fire of the sun and the photosynthesis of the leaves. An apple does not exist without the water that falls on it in the form of rain. An apple cannot exist without the oxygen and the carbon dioxide that are part of its cycle. An apple does not exist without the earth and the nutrients in which its root system is sunk. There is no such thing as an apple. There is no such thing as me and there is no such thing as you. There is just this extraordinary interplay and inter-is-ness of all physical manifestations. So, when you eat an apple, eat it very carefully. The truth is, when you eat anything, even as simple a thing as an apple, what is happening is not

some kind of gastric mechanism operating on a dead piece of fruit. What is happening is this extraordinary dialogue between two intelligences, the intelligence that went into the manifestation of an apple and the intelligence that went into the manifestation of you. So it is not just that you are what you eat. I believe you are how you eat. Eat mindfully because all eating in some sense is cannibalism; it is even worse than cannibalism, all eating is self-eating.

Everything exists in and through everything else. So the apple, in some sense, is this metaphor for this cycle of life. When you think about it, an apple seed has an extraordinary ability. An apple seed gives birth to its own grandmother. I think that must be why there is a kind of apple called Granny Smith! When you think about it, when an apple seed falls to the ground and dies, it does not just die, it gives birth. But it does not just give birth to another seed that looks just exactly like itself. It does not even give birth to an apple that would have been its own mother, it gives birth to an apple tree that is its own grandmother. Every seed gives birth to its own grandmother.

When I think about Jesus' resurrection and I think about Eucharist that is exactly what happens. Jesus is like the seed dying on Good Friday. What did Jesus give birth to? He did not just give birth to another Jesus. He gave birth to a church that holds the Eucharist that again births Jesus. So Jesus gave birth to his own grandmother, the community. Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." Jesus, in his dying and his rising, gave birth to his own grandmother and you and I are the grandmothers of Jesus. As Jesus' grandmothers, we give birth to the Eucharist that gives birth to Christ who feeds us. So the thing that the grandmother gives birth to winds up feeding the grandmother. So who are you really? Who, in God's name, do you really think you are?

Do you really think you are this stuff, flesh and bones? Is that it? The Western model of personality and the Western model of body are so limited. I much prefer the Hindu notion of body. Hindus believe that the body exists at seven totally different levels each vibrating at higher frequencies only one of which can be seen because it is vibrating within 700 to 400 nanometers within the infrared to ultraviolet range. But the other bodies are just as real. Hinduism says we do indeed have a physical body: the gross body. When it dies, it is just recycled molecularly back into the ecosystem. Vibrating at a slightly higher level is the subtle body: the aura body. When the first body dies, this second one is recycled as free energy back into the universe, as intelligence back into the universe. There is a third level of body that they call the Astral body and it is the body you use when you dream. That is the body you are using when you have out of body experiences and that is the body you use during near death experiences and that is the body you use as a place for your emotions.

There is a fourth level of the body that is called the mental body. It is like Plato's ideal realm: the place where all ideas already exist, the place of ratiocination, reason, concept and inspiration. This is called the mental body. There is a fifth level of body that is called the causal body. The causal body is, in Hinduism, the repository of all of the experiences you have had in all of the life times in which you have lived. It is the first truly transpersonal dimension to the human being. It is at this level that clairvoyance and telepathy and precognition are possible because at this level, there is only one mind. There are not ontologically discrete brains each gestating their own ideas, there is only one super-mind giving birth to the ideas that flow through all of us.

There is a sixth level of body. It is called Atman or individual soul. This is the tiny little articulation of God. This totally separate essence that is as far back as you can go and be separated from God. Then there is a seventh level of body that is called Brahman. Brahman is unity consciousness. At this stage, we merge back into the source whence we originally came where there is only God loving God. So who do you think you are in that model? Do you think

you are just the meat, blood, veins, and the tendons? Or do you think you are just your ideas? Or do you think you are just your emotions? Where do you put yourself on that scale?

I remember going down to Anaheim for the first time ever in 1984 and walking through Disneyland. I loved all of the rides. I was excited by everything, but what fascinated me most was Mickey Mouse. I am serious. I followed Mickey Mouse around for about an hour and a half because it was near the close of the day and I wanted to see who came out of the suit at the end of the day. I was fascinated. There was this extraordinary creature, not allowed to speak, walking around greeting children, interacting with people and I had no idea who was inside. Was it an old man in his 90s? Was it a high-school student earning a bit of money? Was it a little girl? Was it a mother of a family? I had no idea. I followed that Mickey Mouse for an hour and a half but unfortunately he disappeared into some kind of changing room and I have no idea who was in the costume.

So who steps out of your spacesuit? Who steps out of this Mickey Mouse costume that you inhabit and call your body? At the end, when the show is over and Disneyland closes down for the night, who steps out of your Mickey Mouse suit? So my first question is, who in God's name do you really think you are?

My second question then is this. What do you mean, "He rose from the dead?" A few weeks ago, I was reading a book by Deepak Chopra and I came across this interesting fact. Snails, your little common garden snails, take three seconds to process something visually. So if something happens in less than three seconds, they cannot register it. If you had a snail walking towards an apple and you reached in and took the apple at that speed, the snail would not see your hand. In the snail's perception, the apple would have just disappeared; the snail could not process it. If something happens in less than $1/20^{\text{th}}$ of a second, humans cannot process it visually, so if you are sitting at the breakfast table with an apple in front of you and someone reached in and pulled away the apple in less than $1/20^{\text{th}}$ of a second, you would not see it happen. As far as you are concerned, your apple just went poof.

Now it gets much more frightening because, in truth, when we get down to the quantum mechanical level, a photon winks in and out of existence a million times per second. At the quantum mechanical level we are not able to process anything. We do not see anything. But if you could get down to that level, you would realize that all motion is an illusion. Things do not move at the quantum mechanical level. Simply different photons wink into existence and wink out of existence in different locations giving the idea of motion. It is like your Christmas tree and the Christmas lights. You put a row of Christmas lights around your house and you get them to wink on in sequence and from a distance it looks like there is a single light running around your house. The truth is there is no motion happening. Just individual lights are winking in and out of existence in different positions to give the impression of something moving. That is the kind of body you have. Your body at the quantum mechanical level is made up of photons that are winking in and out of existence millions of times per second. So no matter how fast you think you are, you are a lot faster.

Is that the body? Is that what we mean by Jesus rising from the dead? What do we mean he rose from the dead? Are we talking about the meat and the flesh resurrecting? Or are we talking about something happening beginning at the quantum mechanical level and somehow being made visible to the chosen ones? Jesus, it seems, could, after his resurrection, materialize and dematerialize. He was able to appear in rooms and then suddenly he was gone. Locked doors? No problem! They could not recognize him. It is very hard to recognize a photon. Is that what we are talking about?

Paul, for instance, is very definite when he writes in the First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 15, about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He uses two different words for body. The

Greek actually has three different words for body and Paul is using two of them in that letter “sarx” and “soma.” “Sarx” is flesh. “Soma” is a different notion of body. Paul says, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” So when Paul is talking about the resurrection of Jesus he is saying, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” He is not talking about “sarx,” he is talking about “soma.” Paul says, “What you set in the ground and what blooms consequently, are totally unrecognizable from each other.” The apple seed and an apple tree look very different. So often when we think about the resurrection of Jesus we are asking ourselves the wrong kind of questions.

How quick is a flash? We have been brought up with the belief system that life proceeds in sequences, you are conceived and you are born and you live and you die and if you are lucky, you will rise from the dead. That happens sequentially. When you listen to Jesus, it is not like that at all. It does not spin itself out over 60, 70 or 80 years nor do we have to wait until the end of the world and the general resurrection and a general judgment for all of us to get to heaven. Here is what Jesus had to say. As he is dying on the cross, one of the thieves turned to him and said, “Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” Jesus’ response was not, “Okay, wait until the end of the world, go to Purgatory, suffer for your sins, then we will talk about it again.” He did not say that. What he said to him was, “This day, you will be with me in paradise.” Because time is a human construct, the big illusion under which we labor is that life is what happens between birth and death. The truth is life is what happens between incarnation and enlightenment, not between birth and death.

Therefore, resurrection is not about the rising of the physicality of a personality. Using a Zen koan, resurrection is about recognizing the face you had before your parents were born. But you cannot recognize that in your head. It only happens in the secret place of the human heart. Resurrection can only be understood at the soul level and at the heart level. So how do you know it is true? I believe you know something is true if it transforms you. And you know something is utterly true if it radically transforms you. That is the acid test of truth and that is the acid test of reality. So how do we know resurrection is true? How are we absolutely sure resurrection happens? Because it was a radically transforming experience for those who participated, as it is still a radically transforming experience 2000 years later to those who understand it not in the head but in the heart.

Exactly 20 years ago today, on Easter Sunday, 1980, I had a vision of someone encountering resurrection, Mary Magdalene, and I wrote it down and I am going to finish by reading that story to you. I call it:

“Falling in Love, Rising in Love.”

“She emptied the big earthen pitcher into a wooden basin and splashed the cool water on her face. Her deep brown eyes were swollen and bloodshot. She tied back her long shiny black tresses with a piece of cloth and bundled them into a veil. Her face was pale and gaunt after her 50-hour fast. Hastily she threw a cloak over her shoulders, carefully picked up the alabaster jar, took the wooden bar from the inside of the drawer and stepped into the half-night. The morning chill stung her throat as she turned swiftly and sped along the silent streets.

Yellow-white ribbons of light infiltrated feebly from the East awaiting the fainter stars. She hadn’t expected that it would end like this. She didn’t know what she had expected except that this had never occurred to her. It was still difficult to believe it had really happened. But like everything else about him she accepted it completely with a total love only a woman is capable of offering a man. Life

had never been the same since she met him. The searching, gentleness of his eyes and the soothing healing touch of his hands had melted the bitterness within her and had banished the despair and depression that until then had frequently enveloped her like a thick, choking, claustrophobic fog. Sin and guilt and suicidal remorse had given way to a deep, tranquil peace. In the darkness of the doorway, a mongrel dog stood up, arched his back, yawned and then stealthily watched her.

My god, she thought, has all the blackness and the nauseating despondency to return now that he is gone? Gone? He is gone. Is there nothing more for me now except to remain faithful to a memory? She skirted the hill and her sandals kicked up fluffy cowlicks of red dust. As she opened the gate of the garden, she suddenly remembered that there would be a very large stone at the mouth of the burial chamber. Frustrated, she ran the last few yards and stopped abruptly looking at the gaping mouth of the empty tomb. Terror wrapped itself around her heart. Even in death, is he to find no peace from the relentless pursuit of his enemies? she thought. Hysterically she raced back to the city and told Peter and John what had happened. In utter bewilderment, they ran to the graveyard to see for themselves while she followed breathlessly far behind.

Peter and John saw and began to dare to believe. They headed back to the still slumbering city rushing past her without a word. Again she was left alone with an empty grave. Her pent-up grief exploded and she fell to her knees, body shaking convulsively, hair spilling around her face and tears trickling through her fingers. My God, let all of this be just a bad dream. Let me wake up and find it is only a phantom of the night. She raised her head and looked into the tomb again. Two young men were seated there. They asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" "They have taken my lord away," she sobbingly replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." As she said this, she was conscious of a movement behind her and looking around she saw another man standing there. He asked her the same question. Shimmering tears refracted her vision, stray locks of hair stuck to her face and a newborn son was still awaiting his form so she did not recognize him.

Thinking him to be the keeper of the graveyard, she bowed and clasped his feet and pleaded, "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him and I will go and remove him." Jesus smiled and said, "Mary." It was enough. The intonation, the accent, the sensitivity and the love all intertwined in that last word could only be his. She struggled to her feet and fired herself at him smothering him in an embrace. He stroked her hair and gently brushed the tears from her face with his fingertips, smiling all the while. Then he said to her, "Mary, do not cling to me. Go and tell my brothers and sisters that I'm alive." "No, Jesus, let me stay with you. I don't ever want you to go away again," she protested. He smiled again and said, "I also want to remain with you always and I will, but how you do not understand. Do you believe me?" "Yes, oh, yes I believe. And my love gives me understanding. I know that you will keep this promise also." He kissed her gently on the forehead and said, "Go then and tell them what you have seen." She pressed his fingers to her lips and then left him. Lightly dancing her way back to the city.

Early groups of workers were beginning to wake sluggishly. A wizened old man in a white flowing beard stumbled out of a doorway, as she was about to pass. "Shalom," she smiled at him. "Shalom, daughter of Zion," he replied wondering how swollen, bloodshot eyes could laugh as hers did. "Did you have a pleasant Sabbath yesterday?" he asked. Her bottom lip quivered involuntarily, "No ancient one," she said. "Not yesterday, today is my Sabbath." He looked quizzically after her departing form. "Strange," he thought. "Strange eyes, strange face, strange words, very strange words."