

# Seeing a light in the dark

*How we once have lost, but now are rediscovering,  
a life of belonging and balanced duality*

**Wim Bonis**

We are stardust  
We are golden  
And we've got to get ourselves  
Back to the garden

*Woodstock – Joni Mitchell*

I think we all know – however civilized we might consider ourselves to be in the Western world, surrounded by many wonderful technological inventions and economical comforts – that along the way we have lost access to another, more mysterious and more meaningful world, and deep within our hearts have never stopped longing to find it again and restore our access to it. In our sense of separation from the surrounding natural world, we have not only put ourselves outside the natural dimension of cyclical and balanced duality and replaced it by an artificial, restless existence of various unbalanced dualisms. In this process, we have also dualistically split up that Otherworld, into a Paradise which we projected on to a distant ancestral past and a Heaven which we projected onto a future beyond our earthly life. And the dimension of Heaven in the afterlife got split again dualistically into Heaven and Hell – thereby referring to a place of perpetual light and one of perpetual darkness.

We might think that we have left these notions about the existence of an Otherworld behind us, but if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we never truly felt comfortable and at peace in a purely material, secular world: we never lost that notion, that we have lost something essential to make our live meaningful, and have never stopped searching for

it – if only in our nightly dreams. But by stubbornly sticking to our dualistic mindset – backed-up either by a form of monotheistic religion or by materialist science –, through the centuries we have only intensified our dualistic struggles. We can see that, due to the crises generated by the corona pandemic and by climate change, many groups of people are getting in conflict with other and easily get involved in dualistic struggles. And we can also see that our sense of separation lies at the basis of the various crises that we are facing at the moment – which in my view are different manifestations of one underlying spiritual crisis. We badly need to heal our sense of separation on a collective scale, and we can only do this through an awakening process which transforms our consciousness. Fortunately, there are many hopeful signs that this healing process is happening already. Importantly, in this process we will find out that both Paradise and the Kingdom of Heaven have always been much nearer to us than we have always thought – and still are accessible to us.

### **Why are we surprised?**

Historically we have built a society that is supposed to exist more or less independently from the surrounding natural world. This society, extends across the entire Western world, is built on the conviction that we humans were unlike any other living being in the natural world: unique, superior and exclusive. At our birth we were all completely enchanted by everything around us – by humans, animals, plants, water, the expanse of the sky, the warmth of the sun, the magic of snow and ice, and so on – giving us paradisiacal or heavenly experiences. These were powerful individual experiences of a Paradise, or a Heaven, which therefore in our experience did not exist far away at a distance but existed all around us on Earth. In our individual upbringing and our cultural heritage most of us quickly learn, however, that the surrounding natural world is supposed to be merely a material collection of resources only waiting to be exploited – to serve us with its giant store of water and food, and to supply us with materials for our own comfort. In this respect, the Irish philosopher and ‘modern mystic’ John Moriarty has pointed out that in our culture we have chosen to shape Nature to suit us, instead of letting Nature shape us to suit it.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that we learn to take good care of a small circle of family and friends – that we must enjoy as much peace and harmony with them as we can –, but that beyond that, in society at large, and in the even larger wilderness that surrounds it, there is no peace and harmony: there we must put ourselves and all our competitive, profit-oriented activities first. We learn that we are born to struggle for existence: since we have discredited our belief in God, life is supposed to be all about a Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’. We learn that human society is a place of widespread distrust, ruled by outer control – a place in which our narrow-minded, egocentric attitude to life is always rewarded and getting us to the top of the hierarchy of businesses, corporations, political parties and governmental organizations. In this context, we feel justified to put other people down and to treat them badly. Although Darwinism should have made us aware that we are mere animals among the other animals, somehow, we humans have kept considering ourselves unique and special beings. In this mindset, we allow ourselves to feel indifferent to the suffering of animals and feel justified to be quite careless in our treatment of the natural environment.

How come that we are then very surprised to find that some people manage to be very good in being egocentric, competitive, profit-orientated, and in being exploitative of the natural world – for instance, at cutting down the forests on a large scale? Why are we surprised that being wealthy and successful is widely connected with having a lot of money on a private bank account and having power over other people? Why are we surprised about the widening gap between rich and poor, about people being able to enjoy a luxurious life when they know that millions of people are still starving? Why are we surprised then that there is fraud within many organizations and governments on a global scale? Why are we surprised that organizations and governments are in perpetual conflict with each other as well, trying to outdo each other all the time, and primarily focus on their own interests? Why are we surprised that in troubled times (like today), in which we have to deal with several global crises, people easily polarize into little groups that cannot stop fighting each other and generally feel driven to scapegoat other people – thinking that this is only natural and even serves their own survival?

I think I know the answer to these questions, and central to it is a very obvious fact, namely that we have excluded ourselves from the natural world, from the web of life – from the living world which essentially has a dual character and on different levels perpetually moves through cycles – and have elevated ourselves above it. Since we have lost our sense of being enchanted by the natural world – of being embedded in the dual nature of our own body and the larger body of the landscape, of living a balanced life –, we have created for ourselves an unbalanced and restless state. In this state we have been caught in all kinds of dualistic struggles that seem to intensify as long as we keep considering ourselves exclusive, superior, egocentric beings. We can only free ourselves from the burden of these struggles by fully restoring our sense of being fully embedded in dual nature – simultaneously in our own body and in the natural world around us.

This sounds quite simple, but it involves a complete transformation of our consciousness. I don't think the mainstream media are quite up to date with regard to the developments in this field. It still creates the impression that mere injections of large amounts of money and creations of new technologies would be enough to get us through some of the crises that we are facing at the moment, like the corona and environmental crisis. More and more thinkers, however – and I am one of them –, are convinced that we are on the threshold of nothing less than a worldwide paradigm shift. Some decades ago the American physician Irving Oyle gave a brief and clear explanation about the phenomenon of the *paradigm*: 'A paradigm consists of a set of theories, mathematical formulas, and hypotheses which describe the structure and behavior of a particular part of reality in terms of the known information about that reality. (...) Just as we wouldn't eat the cookbook for the dinner it describes, we shouldn't mistake the paradigm for the reality it describes.' In other words, as Alfred Korzybski has famously expressed: 'the map is not the territory.' But I would add to this, that a paradigm is also about the relationship between the cookbook and the dinner, between the map and the territory. Paradigm shifts are about changes in the relationship between both. Oyle acknowledged that paradigm shifts 'are not simple processes'; that even when people know that the old paradigm is falling apart, they still hold on it, until a new paradigm is created.<sup>2</sup>

That the current paradigm shift is not a simple process, we can witness all around us. To make it successful, much more is needed than the input of money and technology, however important these happen to be. As said, it involves a complete transformation of our own consciousness. First, we must realize that we can never rediscover a balanced dual nature as long as we keep sticking to our position of dualistic thinking. Second, we need to transform our sense of what we consider *natural* and what not. And third, we also need to transform the idea of *who we are* as humans and *where are*, individually and collectively. Part of this transformation is the realization the ‘who’ and ‘where’ questions cannot be separated from each other and reveal the same kind of story, which connects and interweaves our present culture with the culture of our distant ancestors. Therefore, the American cultural philosopher Charles Eisenstein has called this story *the new and ancient story*.<sup>3</sup>

To realize this, we must go through a process of psychological and spiritual awakening. An important part of this awakening process is the realization that we have to get rid of the wrong, *outdated* ideas about ourselves:

- that living an unbalanced and restless life is the way things are supposed to be, a reflection of our ‘natural state’;
- that, because of this conviction, we believe that we are meant to be perpetually involved in dualistic struggles with the surrounding world;
- that living a balanced, peaceful life belongs to the sphere of unrealistic, utopian dreams, and is not something to give serious consideration.

The fortunate thing is that, although the new paradigm might not have been fully created yet, the processes pointing to a paradigm shift are already happening in ourselves, and all around us as well. But the different processes might appear to be unrelated to each other, and therefore people might not yet recognize them to be part of an overarching paradigm shift. It is important that everyone starts recognizing the connection between them, to trust that they take us in the right direction – and also that we start fueling these processes with our own contributions, knowing that every individual contribution, however apparently small, matters an awful lot.

This article is one of my contributions to help fueling these processes. I will try to map the various fields that are affected by experiencing ourselves as fully embedded in the natural world, and how all these fields are also affected by the process of separating ourselves from the natural world – and finally, how reviving our original state of being embedded in the natural world through an all-encompassing awakening process will affect all these fields again in a positive way. To survive as a species, I think it is absolutely essential to collectively reach this final state, which reconnects us to our original state of balance. It is not easy, but it is achievable for everyone – if we realize what is at stake and put all our attention on it. It will be very rewarding, but the reward will not be material, in the sense of getting an economic top position, a large bank account and becoming the private owner of a lot of material possessions. In the awakening process, our ideas about wealth and success will be transformed as well, and once again become the immaterial phenomena that they originally have been.

### **Balance**

We owe the idea that originally our life was not very pleasant and was burdened with ceaseless struggle and competition, largely to the 17<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who famously stated that life in our natural state has been ‘a war of all against all’, in which life has been ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. As long as we believe this to be true (and it is amazing that many people still do), it is understandable that we like to keep as far as possible from our natural state and definitely do not long to reacquaint ourselves with it. But Hobbes’ ideas were very much inspired by the warfare and conflicts that he experienced in the society around him, and by the available dualistic philosophies about life, all written by men, which separated our human life completely from the natural world and put us on a pedestal, raised above it. We can assume that his ideas were not really informed by his personal ‘outdoor’ experiences, by spending a lot of time in the surrounding natural world and allowing himself to be fully embedded in it. It is likely that his negative ideas about nature were very much formed by observing the surrounding natural world from a safe distance, but also by the suppression of the unwanted ‘bestly’ desires in himself.

In the nineteenth century it was Darwin who invited us to go outdoors and rediscover our connection to the rest of the natural world. But Darwinism, and the later versions of Social Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism, never changed the basic Hobbesian notion that the essence of life is all about competition, conflict and struggle. This basic notion did not change, despite the attempts by researchers like Peter Kropotkin, who at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century argued that life was not so much about struggle but about ‘mutual aid’, and that evolution had not been driven primarily by struggle but by mutual aid.<sup>4</sup> Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – with increased knowledge about and insight into nature, into the culture of our ancestors, and also into the culture of still living indigenous people – we have a much better idea of what being embedded in the natural world once meant (and still means): the conditions have been and still are harsh and dangerous at times, but overall feeling embedded in the natural world did once generate and still generates today a deep sense of balance and peace in us. It is a state that surprisingly has been reflected quite well in the ancient descriptions of Paradise.

When we talk about our own human nature or the natural world that surrounds us, we easily assume that in both cases we are dealing with one specific entity. We might still be slightly aware that deep down, at the source level, there exists a unity in everything and that everything is inextricably connected to and interwoven with each other – faint memories of Paradise or the Tao. But even when we are aware of the existence of that deeper level of life, we still experience that both our own nature, every life form in the surrounding natural world, and the natural world itself, all have an essential *dual character* and are involved in continual processes of cyclical change.

Everything alive in nature goes through these cyclical changes, as had already been noticed by the Taoists in ancient China when they had observed the ever-changing movement between the complementary yin and yang sides of life, which was unified at the deeper mysterious level of the Tao. The famous yin/yang symbol beautifully expresses the fact that originally the ongoing processes of moving through the changes of yin and yang have been in balance. What Taoists qualified as living according to the Tao, in Christian terms was referred to as living in Paradise – the timeless

world before the occurrence of the Fall. In this balanced state our own dual nature is fully part of and inextricably connected to the dual cyclical world of nature around us. In the process of continual cyclical change in our individual lives we feel completely embedded in the surrounding landscape. In the balanced state we are also aware that we cannot to step outside our own body and the body of the surrounding landscape, to observe from without, by simply separating ourselves from it. (Although near-death experiences, that I will discuss later, might give the impression that we are able to observe nature – in this case our body – from without, in these extraordinary experiences we haven't separated ourselves from the natural world: in fact, by going through these experiences, we went deeper into it.)

In this respect, we should realize that the surrounding landscape is not limited to the material manifestation of the land: it extends across the large bodies of water of seas and oceans – that we could call *the seascape* – and into the sky above us – that we could call *the skyscape*. And this skyscape extends of course beyond the atmosphere into the massive cosmos beyond the Earth. To refer to the entire natural world in which our human world is embedded, I think David Abram's term *the more-than-human world*, is meaningful.<sup>5</sup> It includes not only the landscape, but also the seascape, the skyscape, and all the non-human animals and plants in them. We should also realize that the natural world – and therefore the more-than-human world – is not limited to the material side of life: it has an immaterial side as well. Both the monotheistic religions and the materialist form of science have been responsible for separating the so-called *supernatural* from the natural world and considering both to be exclusive realms. This separation is, as I will argue below, part of the dualistic worldview that has been the driving force in these religions and in this form of science. In the state of balanced dual nature, the supernatural is part of the natural world: it is merely an expression of its invisible, immaterial side.

As said, we humans also have a dual nature. The Dutch anthropologist Jan van Baal, for instance, has pointed out that we all possess such a dual nature: on the one hand we are born from and remain connected to the universe, and on the other hand as a subject (which is his way of referring to the human ego) we experience ourselves as separated beings who put themselves in opposition to the world. According to him, these two



equivalent sides are always present in us. Through identifying ourselves with the subject side of our being and overemphasizing its importance in our world, however, we tend to forget that the deeper interconnection side is actually a part of our being as well, even the oldest and most significant part.<sup>6</sup> Other researchers have identified our dual nature in a slightly different way. It is well known that Carl Jung acknowledged that we all have a (personal and collective) unconsciousness and a consciousness, a Self and an I, or an ego. In this respect, brain researcher Roger Sperry mapped in the 1960s the dichotomy of our brain, the left and right hemispheres of the brain with their distinct properties.<sup>7</sup> And, of course, we all have a heart and a head which contains our brain.

In a state of balance, the subject side of ourselves, although it is driven by a sense of separation, is a servant to our deeper side that feels inextricably connected to the universe; our ego is servant to the unconscious; our left hemisphere of the brain is servant to the right hemisphere; and our entire brain is a servant to our heart.

### **Duality and dualism**

I know that the concepts of *duality* and *dualism* are often used indiscriminately, but for me there is a big difference between them. It is good to keep that in mind. In my view, duality represents a balanced reality of continual cyclical change, a reality in which two sides are always considered complementary and are constantly and without restraint interchanging with each other. Night turns into day, and into night again; the winter turns into summer, and into winter again; we awake from being asleep and after a while we fall asleep again. Even between phenomena like the feminine and masculine there exists an ongoing movement of change, and in our body there are the poles of the right and left hemispheres of our brain, the heart and the head. This balanced duality implies the underlying Tao that I mentioned earlier, expressing the paradisiacal and enchanting experience of being completely embedded in the ever-changing natural world – while simultaneously acknowledging and accepting the harsh conditions of daily life. Balanced duality is the balance between yin and yang – two basic elements of life, which are not truly separate from each

other and are not in conflict with each other but are complementing each other all the time.

Importantly, balanced duality does not mean that there is *equal weight* to the two sides of the whole: the yin and yang are *equivalent* to each other. But in this equivalence, there is an emphasis on the yin element: on the winter, the night, the right hemisphere, the heart – and indeed on the feminine. The balanced duality of the Tao emphasizes the wisdom that everything is always born out of darkness, that life is born from death, that every root needs the dark fertile Earth, and that during our lives we continue to be fed from this fertile darkness.

We must also never forget that balanced duality can only exist when we experience our life as being fully embedded in the natural world. It implies that we can only keep in touch with the balanced duality of life by remaining within its context and by fully participating in its ongoing cyclical changes. The moment we stop participating and project ourselves outside of it, to observe the natural world from an imaginary external position – to objectify and analyze it by breaking it up in countless separate parts, to try and control nature from this external position – we simultaneously have lost that state of balance duality.

That is the moment when we enter a state of unbalanced dualism, of being completely separated from the Tao. Dualism therefore always implies a rootless reality – a reality that is disconnected from the source of life. It represents a reduced form of reality in which the two sides of reality have been changed into absolute opposites, into a state of opposition to one another, and into a struggle between each other for dominance. And it is important to notice that in this struggle for dominance, the order of equivalence between the two poles has also been reversed: the dominant position is claimed by the summer, the daytime, the head, the left hemisphere of the brain, the ego and the masculine. A hierarchical order is introduced in which the dark source of life is neglected, avoided as much as possible, and the feminine is suppressed. This hierarchical order expresses a *loss of equivalence* between the two sides – an equivalence which had existed in the natural state of balanced duality.

In short, dualistic tension and fighting becomes only a reality when we have lost touch with the underlying Tao; when we have lost our sense of

being completely embedded in the surrounding natural world. Yet, as pointed out earlier, we keep having this sense that we have lost a much more agreeable, paradisiacal world – accompanied by a permanent feeling of restlessness, of desperately searching to find it again. This restlessness could also just express itself as a vague sense of not wanting to stay in the place where you are now, of badly wanting to go somewhere else. In this respect I have to think about the popular Dutch television program called *Ik vertrek* ('I leave'), which reports Dutch people moving to a place abroad to start a new life: their most important motive seems not to be moving to a more exciting place to continue their life, but grasping the first good opportunity that enables them to leave Dutch society behind them. It gives a good impression of a sense of restlessness that a lot of viewers seem to recognize (including myself, by the way: no one is completely free from it!). It is the state that Blaise Pascal referred to when he stated: 'All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.'

It is well known that Adam and Eve leaving Paradise, as reported in the biblical story of Genesis, is said to have generated the Fall – a term that clearly expresses that this event has involved a process of *falling downwards*. But paradoxically, after we had excluded ourselves from the matrix of the natural world, somehow, we seemed to have managed to *elevate* ourselves hierarchically, to an imagined position above nature. In other words, for a long time we have believed that due to the Fall we humans have moved in an *upwards* direction. And even more importantly, trapped in dualism, Hobbes made us also believe that this fallen, elevated state of struggle and perpetual warfare is our natural state. In this way dualistic thinking, and all the tensions and struggles that it has powered, are considered an inevitable reflection of the essence of who we are – without fully realizing that they have only become possible since we have cut ourselves off from the underlying source of balanced duality and wholeness.

In fact, this source – the Tao – continues to be much more powerful than our artificially created state of separation and unbalance, and never stops drawing us back into its sphere of balance and wholeness. But in our state of experiencing our lives as separated from the more-than-human world, we do not recognize the beneficial character of the underlying and all-

encompassing Tao, and experience it instead as something very threatening – a threat that mythically was embodied by dragon like creatures that needed the power of Gods, Heroes or Saints to be able to slay them. But to maintain our separated dualistic state we had to keep making an effort at slaying, however unconscious it might have become, to resist the ongoing pull to the source, to the Tao – which is much larger and more powerful than ourselves and can never disappear. This meant, of course, that the dragons would never really die and through time would raise their power again and again – and needed to be slain again as well by the newly arisen Gods, Heroes or Saints.

We have often tried to solve all kinds interpersonal and interhuman tensions and struggles without leaving our dualistic mindset behind us. We still try to do that today, when we deal with the problems of polarization and scapegoating. But within this mindset we are blind to the fact that the very approach, in which struggle and opposition are central, is part of the problem, and will never lead to anywhere near a solution, at least not a structural one. To deal with them structurally, we must realize that our dualistic thinking, and all the struggles powered by it, are the result of our (imagined) separation from the living natural context of balanced duality and wholeness. Only by letting go of our urge to control, surrender ourselves again to the matrix of the more-than-human world and rediscover our sense of belonging to the whole, we can only find a true solution – and we can realize, in the words of Charles Eisenstein, ‘the more beautiful world that our hearts know is possible’.<sup>8</sup>

### **The growth process**

It is important to realize that being open and receptive is absolutely essential to make a growth process, including our own, possible. Being alive means to keep on growing – first primarily in a biological sense, and later on more psychologically and spiritually – by an ongoing movement through the cycles of life. This is not the kind of growth linear process that has been promoted by the market economy. It is a cyclical growth process that does not just go upward, but downwards as well. All living beings, including us, are embedded in these cyclical processes. This growth process is illustrated beautifully and meaningfully by trees – with branches and leaves that keep

reaching higher for sunlight and roots that keep reaching deeper and wider into the earth for nourishment. As the roots grow deeper into the earth and manage to interconnect with other trees, their branches can grow higher and wider as well. No wonder that trees have played an important part in the ancient mythical worldview of our ancestors and have kept their meaningful place in indigenous cultures all over the world, as we can see the development of our own life mirrored in them.

As long as we keep growing in this cyclical way, we are well protected from falling into the trap of dualistic struggles. Then we live a life in which our dual nature is balanced, and in which both sides are equivalent and can express themselves fully. But when this natural growth process in ourselves is blocked, we are driven to use the vacant energy for destructive purposes, to put it into collective us-and-them thinking, resulting in struggles with other (groups of) people. In other words, we fall into the trap of dualism.

We have all experienced the ever-changing reality of dual nature when we were a growing fetus in the womb, when our mother's womb served as our direct nurturing landscape – in which not only food powered our growth process, but also invisible field-forces of the soul generated our growth process. And we might have forgotten that the power and efficacy of this womb/matrix has never stopped after we were born. The American author Joseph Chilton Pearce has made me aware of the existence of this womb/matrix power that keeps assisting us in different forms with our growth process during our entire life. According to Pearce, a womb offers three things to new life: 'a source of possibility, a source of energy to explore this possibility, and a safe place where this exploration can take place'.<sup>9</sup> He has pointed out that after leaving our mother's womb, this womb/matrix protection continues in other forms: the matrix of our parental care, of friendships, of school education, of being part of a political party or of any other community. When they provide us with this possibility for growth and a safe environment that we can fully integrate in, they keep on nurturing our further growth. This kind of openness and receptiveness has always been essential in our growth process after birth – as said earlier, not only on a biological level, but on a psychological and spiritual level as well. When I will discuss Bruce Lipton's research about the cell membrane

below, we will see that this open state to make growth possible has a firm biological basis.

It is important to add here that the beneficial power of any particular womb/matrix is always *temporary*. Like is the case with the mother's womb of nine months, any other matrix should not be continued forever. When her beneficial time is over, we must leave her behind and enter another one. As long as we keep growing, there are always other ones available. And we have to be aware of the fact that the womb/matrix is not limited to the human world. During our life we are all embedded in the matrix of Mother Earth, and our planet is again part of and dependent on larger planetary systems that function as enormous protective and nurturing matrices. We are truly earth beings that cannot exist for very long outside the matrix of Mother Earth (as the astronauts who have spent some time in outer space have shown us) – a matrix which includes of course the atmosphere that allows us to breathe, but also the other fields that exert their power over us, like gravity, the electro-magnetic field of the Earth, and the morphic field of humanity that is involved with shaping our body and handing down our cultural heritage. Without this larger matrix of Mother Earth, the smaller growth processes in the womb of our own mother and the various matrices assisting us during our life, could not exist at all: therefore, in a way they are all secondary to the Mother Earth matrix. And we should not forget that even this large matrix still has a temporary nature: at the end of our life, we all leave it behind us; and then of course the question is raised what kind of mysterious matrix we will enter after that...

Because of the temporary nature of any matrix, there are moments in our life of leaving one behind and entering another one. These moments of change are far from easy. We are inclined to hold on as long as possible to the security that a matrix offers us, because leaving it behind disrupts our life. Development psychologist Robert Kegan has aptly qualified these moments as *disruptions of the embeddedness environment*. These disruptive moments of change have happened regularly during our life, and probably are still taking place – for instance, when we took our first steps as a baby, on the first day at school, when we fell in love, got a job, became a parent, got a serious disease, or lost a loved one.<sup>10</sup> These disruptive moments can never be avoided and are an essential part of the growth process. But the

actual growth process itself takes place in the safe environments of nurturing matrices – when we feel embedded and protected again in one of those safe environments.

Understandably, in our materialist-oriented, patriarchal world the ideas about the feminine womb have been limited to its material manifestation in the mother, and very little attention has been paid of the important contribution of this feminine matrix-power to our entire growth process, including our psychological and spiritual growth. Although the ego, which gives us a sense of separation from the surrounding world and puts us in opposition to it, definitely has a place in our being, in its undeveloped state it loses its sense of being a servant to life and starts dominating it. Unfortunately, in Western culture this undeveloped, dominating ego has become associated with who we consider ourselves to be: it gives us a strong sense of identity, with strong imaginary walls around it to keep out any influence that might threaten it. From within an egocentric position, we are generally not aware of the fact that the dominating position of our own undeveloped ego is actually blocking our natural growth process, and therefore invites dualistic struggles into our lives to compensate for the blocked growth process. From this position, probably we also do not realize that this growth process is generated by a feminine matrix-power from a much deeper level; from the very source of our lives – the Tao within us – in which dual nature is still balanced and the ego still knows its original role as a *servant* to the other side of our being that feels deeply connected to surrounding nature.

It is good to return here to the principle of openness and receptivity: for matrix/womb power to work well and beneficial, a state of openness is essential. Fortunately, every living being starts his or her life in this state of openness, including us humans. We are all born as open, receptive beings, both in our body and our mind. In this respect, the American cell biologist Bruce Lipton has communicated some important insights, in his book *The Biology of Belief*. He has argued that the brain or intelligence of every cell resides not in the genes, but in the membrane, that marks the boundary of the cell and keeps the content of the cell together. According to him, the default state of this membrane is open, to let in beneficial influences from the environment – and this openness is directly connected to the growth

process. Once the membrane closes itself off, to protect the cell from harmful influences, the growth process is also stopped, because all the energy then must be put into protection and preservation. Lipton is convinced that this finding has an enormous relevance and meaning for us human beings as well, because we are not single beings but communities of trillions of cooperating cells. He has pointed out that in our society that emphasis has shifted to the closed-protective state, and thereby the related fight-or-flight response has been put on the foreground, by which we simultaneously and unavoidably have blocked our own growth process.<sup>11</sup> With this, he has shown that the growth potential of a matrix, and the blocking of this potential, has an actual biological basis.

### **Frustrating and blocking the growth process**

With changing the emphasis from openness to the closed-off protective state of the cell membrane, the growth process has been frustrated and has become blocked. Of course, this change corresponds to the ‘explosion’ of our ego development, which manifests itself a few years after we have been born. When our identity shifts to the ego, to the separate self, the center of who we consider ourselves to be moves from the heart and hara center to our head, and more specifically to the left hemisphere of our brain. We start to identify ourselves as a being that is separated from the surrounding world. This identification with the ego in its undeveloped state has a tremendous influence on the power of the matrices that I discussed earlier. As I have pointed out above, a matrix needs openness and receptivity to be beneficial. And unfortunately, this openness and receptivity is not always there. Because every matrix is temporary, in time it will always lose its quality of openness and receptivity. But as soon as egocentric interests enter the sphere of a matrix – whether this is in the family, among friends, at school, or any other community we feel part of – the beneficial quality of the matrix evaporates immediately, and the matrix becomes even harmful. Then we need to get out of the sphere of influence of this matrix, as quickly as we can – however hard this may be –, because within a closed-off matrix our psychological and spiritual growth process will be frustrated and blocked. Then there is a reasonable chance that the available energy will be used to vent dissatisfaction and to get involved with dualistic struggles



against other groups. In this regard we may wonder whether the dissatisfaction and threats against other people that are vented anonymously through the Internet, are indicators of the spread of frustrated and blocked growth processes in our society.

I think William Blake was deeply aware of the blocking of our growth potential and of the harmful consequences it will generate, when he stated more than two hundred years ago, in his *Proverbs of Hell*: ‘Expect poison from the standing water.’ Nature has meant us to keep growing during our entire life and keeps providing us with the energy to realize this. Whenever the growth process gets blocked, this energy needs to go somewhere else, to be spent in another way. That is when the harmful consequences arrive on the scene. Our ego identification has been cut us off from the deeper interconnected side of our dual nature and has made us feel separate from our fellow human beings as well. With the result that our energy is bound to be spent in dualistic way: we put our energy into creating conflicts and fights with other people – preferable with easy identifiable groups of people.

So perhaps above I have painted a too positive picture of matrices that inherently possess a beneficial quality for our growth process. After all, it might often have been the case that the closed-off social sphere, blocking our growth potential, has been present from the very start – for instance when egocentric interests are dominating the family home; when a circle of friends is infected with a strong hierarchical structure; when we feel threatened by and afraid of the people we feel deeply attached to and depend on for our survival, and so on. When the fight-or-flight response has been on nearly all the time in our life, we have not had much opportunity to grow psychologically and spiritually. It is likely then that we have got stuck in our own inner development, and at a later stage will pass our undeveloped ego experience on to the next generation.

But we should not forget that the natural principle of the inherent beneficial power of matrices, which offer a safe context of openness and receptivity, always remains available everywhere around us. That is why it so important that people keep creating communities and organizations in our society that still offer this openness and receptivity, a safe beneficial matrix environment. Within such a community or organization this

beneficial power can still heal people who have been damaged in this regard. In this way, they can be helped with reopening their blocked growth process.

### **Collective blockage of the growth process**

Perhaps it is already obvious, but I think it is good to emphasize here that the growth process, with its sphere of openness and receptivity to make it possible, and the frustration and blockage of this growth process, generated by closing-off of the mind, is not just a process that touches our individual lives. On a collective level it also applies to humanity at large. And through our culture this collectively level has of course an important influence again on our individual lives from the day we were born. Anyway, it is a fact that historically at some point our growth process has got stuck as well. I think on a collective level the growth process of our entire civilization started to get blocked more and more about 6000 years ago – in the very period that has usually been associated with the beginning of Western civilization. The English psychologist Steve Taylor, who has investigated life far beyond his formal scientific field of psychology, has pointed out that in that period humanity has collectively been confronted with an ‘ego explosion’.<sup>12</sup>

The collective rise of a sense of separation, that resulted from this ego explosion, has increasingly had a tremendous effect on the minds of the people, on their consciousness: more and more people started to feel separated from the surrounding natural world and from their own body – and in this process they started to lose their sense of openness and receptivity, and closed off their minds, thereby also blocking their potential for growth. Due to this process, the experience of reality as a manifestation of balanced dualities in which they felt fully included moved to the background. Another kind of experience of reality increasingly started to dominate the societies – a manifestation of tensions and conflicts powered by dualistic thinking.

Not coincidentally this period was also the period of the rise of patriarchy – the domination of human society by men and masculine values. Because we have been dealing here with an all-encompassing paradigm shift, which completely changed the way humans dealt with life and organized their society, elsewhere I have called this period *the Patriarchal Shift*. Dualistic

thinking has also played a prominent part in it. The further development of Western civilization was shaped on the basis of this paradigm shift.<sup>13</sup>

So when historians let the history of Western civilization start about 6000 years ago, roughly with the Sumerian civilization, unfortunately they have limited their descriptions of the developments in human society to the period that happened after the Patriarchal Shift, when our sense of separation had already started to collectively block the human potential for growth. When historians let history start in this period, they might not have realized that they probably have ignored and bypassed the most important elements of life to get a full understanding of who we are. It is comparable to let an investigation into our own individual life start at the moment when we have developed our ego identity – thereby ignoring the years that had preceded it as not being relevant to understand who we are. And it happens to be the case that in the first years of our life the interconnected side of our dual nature was still determining our experience of life, before our ego started to suppress it and even to forget that it actually existed. When we let history start with Sumerian civilization, we do something similar on a collective scale.

In this respect, it is high time to revive our individual and collective memory. To me it is quite clear that losing touch with our own balanced dual nature, on the collective and individual levels that I have described, lies at the heart of the spiritual crisis that is facing the world today. I have mentioned it earlier, but it is worth repeating. Restoring the balance in our dual nature will not be easy, but we have to. I am afraid that there is no other option open to us anymore: it is essential for our survival. To realize this, we cannot keep planning from within our dualistic mindset. We have to let it go and climb down the ladder of Western superiority and intellectual arrogance, descend from our heads to our hearts. Then we have to open our hearts and be receptive to the messages from other hearts – like those of the indigenous people that have been subordinated for centuries if not millennia by this superiority and arrogance, and the hearts of our own children. Later in this article I will return to this.

## **Balanced duality**

To get a good overview of the present subject, it is important to know what exactly the states of both balanced duality and unbalanced dualism involve – how they affect the other areas of life. Here below I first pay attention to the some of the areas that are affected by the state of balanced duality.

### *1 Death, night and winter*

In a state of balanced duality, we acknowledge that death is an inextricable part of life and we fully accept its presence. Of course, we mourn when someone dies, but we are deeply aware of the fact that life cannot exist without death and actually is nourished by it all the time. This reality can be experienced everywhere around us: the earth underneath our feet is essentially the accumulation of the remains of many dead beings, necessary to keep nourishing all forms of life and help them to keep growing. Everything we eat, to be able to grow and to keep ourselves alive, has to die first. Actually, the earth that we walk upon – or that is hidden underneath the houses, roads and pavements – is not really dead, but just a transformed manifestation of former plants, animals and human beings. The food we have eaten did not really die either but got transformed into the cells and organs of our body. This implies that, feeling embedded in a world of balanced duality, also means that we personally experience – as Bob Dylan has expressed it one of his songs – that ‘death is not the end.’<sup>14</sup>

Our distant ancestors have always known this, and many indigenous people still know this today. That is why cherishing the lives of their dead ancestors has always been very important to them, to keep being nourished by them culturally and spiritually. This insight was also expressed by the full acceptance of the presence of the winter and the nighttime in the relationship between winter and summer and between night and day. In the period of the winter the basis was laid for the blooming in summer; in the nighttime the basis was laid for the daytime. The light was always preceded by the darkness: it was even born from the darkness. When we look at the nighttime sky on a clear night, we can see that all the stars exist within a large surrounding context of dark space, just like sun in our own solar system. As long as we feel embedded in the balanced duality of the natural world, we always stay in touch with ‘the other side’: we do not lose our

awareness of the presence of death, night and winter when we are living our daily life, when we are enjoying the daytime and the period of summer.

The idea we have about death is actually closely associated with the idea we have about *aging*. When we give death a respectful and meaningful place in our life, we equally respect and value the process of aging. Respecting death implies respecting the people who are close to it as well. Human communities that give importance in their culture to their dead ancestors usually also give importance to the cultural contributions of their elders.

## 2 *Diversity & Inclusion in the natural world*

In many organizations today the principle of *Diversity & Inclusion* is promoted as an ideal worth striving for. This usually refers to preventing their organization from being too exclusively peopled with white Western people, and only white men at the top – and to offering more room for coloured people, mentally and physically handicapped people, and women. Their principle of diversity only extends to members of the human race, but it resonates with something in us that extends to the surrounding natural world. In the biological world there is a concept of diversity that focuses on the natural, non-human world: the concept of *biodiversity*. The American writer Gary Ferguson, for instance, has pointed out that this biodiversity is an essential element of our planetary life: ‘This beautifully rich and robust planet is, in all seasons, nothing if not a constantly unfolding testament to the essential power of diversity.’ He has added that this diversity is responsible for our breathable air, our drinkable water, and for the soils that grow our crops.<sup>15</sup> In other words, we are fully included in it as well. We are continually nourished by Mother Earth, urged to keep growing for in Her protective matrix, not only biologically, but also psychologically and spiritually. If we can apply the principle of Diversity and Inclusion to life in general, we realize that it actually goes back to the roots of our existence. It all begins with experiencing one’s life as an integral part of the natural world, being part of its rich diversity. Diversity and Inclusion is an expression of being embedded in a balanced dual nature.

### 3 *Inclusion of the supernatural world*

When we feel embedded in the natural world, there exists no such thing as *the paranormal* or *supernatural*, a realm that is supposed to be very different and completely separated from the natural world. The American anthropologist Lance Foster, who is a member of the Native American Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, has also come to that conclusion. As a result of his research and personal experience, he has lost his belief in the idea of the paranormal. He argues it is just part of the normal, part of what he has called *the invisible ecosystem*.<sup>16</sup> In the state of being embedded in the natural world, phenomena like telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance are considered natural; near-death and out-of-body experiences are considered real and important. We know that animals possess powers of telepathy and precognition: they sense earthquakes and tsunamis in advance, and often manage to save their lives in time. Pets like dogs often know when their owners are coming home, long before there is any sign of them arriving, also when they come home unexpectedly: it seems that the moment of taking the decision to go home is the crucial factor in this.<sup>17</sup>

Indigenous people often still have access to their power of telepathy and precognition. Not only animals appear to be aware of tsunamis before they manifest themselves. In their book *Darkness Visible*, Ross Heaven and Simon Buxton report that the Onge, a tribe living in India, managed to escape from the tsunami that hit Asia in 2004. During the Stone Age the Onge had migrated from Africa forty to sixty thousand years ago and had brought their traditions and knowledge about the spirit world with them. According to the authors, they survived the tsunami because they understood how nature works. They also point out that for these kinds of tribes the spirit of darkness is often the oldest spiritual power and possesses an amazing intelligence.<sup>18</sup> This spirit of darkness was of course manifesting itself during the nighttime and was also connected to the world of death, of the ancestors – the subjects that I discussed earlier. We can assume that for the Onge telepathy and precognition were part of this dimension as well and were still considered natural powers.

Psychologist Robert Wolff tells how at his often unannounced, spontaneous visits to the Sng'oi tribe – the People – in Malaysia, repeatedly he was surprised by the fact that someone was already waiting for him to

arrive: 'Half an hour from the village we were always picked up by someone. It seems that he – or she – had been waiting for us. When we arrived there this person quietly got up and walked the rest of the road ahead of us. There was hardly any talk. The People had no phone; they could not, in any way, know that we would come on a certain day, mid afternoon.' Wolff could find no explanation for the fact that one way or another they were already aware of his arrival.<sup>19</sup> Laurens van der Post tells in his book *A Walk with the White Bushman* about similar experiences with the 'Kalahari Bushmen' (who are now called the San), when he had decided unexpectedly to pay them a visit and someone was already waiting for him along the road to greet him.<sup>20</sup> In another book, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, Van der Post reported another, comparable experience. Once he was on a hunting expedition with some Bushmen, about 80 kilometers from their camp. The expedition had been successful, and he wondered how they would react in the camp when they arrived back. One Bushman told him that they already knew. When Van der Post asked how they knew, he answered: 'They know by wire. We Bushmen have a wire 'here'', tapping his chest in the area of this heart, indicating that they spread their news to others from that area. When later they arrived at the camp, the Bushmen in the camp were already celebrating the successful hunt.<sup>21</sup> More recently Victória Duda has confirmed the existence of these kinds of powers among the San. As she was working on a thesis on legal anthropology in South Africa, a human right lawyer told her: 'One day the San took him on a hunt, during which – the lawyer observed – they always knew in what bush or behind which tree an animal was hiding, even if it wasn't visible. (...) The San revealed that they felt a vibration in-between their eyebrows when the prey was nearby.'<sup>22</sup> Also our own distant ancestors still seemed to have had more access to these powers, called 'the second sight' or 'the fairy faith' among the Celtic peoples.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4 *Mythology*

As long as we feel embedded in the natural world, in a context of balanced duality, our worldview is shaped primarily by mythology. The worldview connected to it is usually cyclical, and in the process of these ongoing cycles Goddesses, Gods, and all kinds of spiritual entities have important if

not central roles to play. They show us that we are not in control of life, but larger forces that we do not fully understand. The mythical stories in which they play this central role help to give meaning to the web of life that includes us humans as well. Myths are rooted in communities in which the traditions and stories are still handed down orally to the next generation. They are shaped by direct experiences of people living their lives within the context of the natural world, which for them is still considered a Sacred world and also includes – as pointed out earlier – the dimension of the ‘supernatural’.

The American mythologist Joseph Campbell distinguished four functions of myth, which interacted with each other on different levels: a mystical function, which makes you realize ‘what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are’, and lets you experience ‘awe before the mystery’; a cosmological function, which shows you ‘what shape the universe is’; a sociological function, which supports and validates ‘a certain social order’; and a pedagogical function, which tells you ‘how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances’. Campbell emphasized that the third, sociological function, ‘has taken over in our world – and is out of date’, and that the fourth one, the pedagogical function, is the most important one for us today, the function that ‘everyone must try to relate to’.<sup>24</sup> When we still felt embedded in the natural world, mythical stories were considered truthful stories, helping to get us through life in an authentic, meaningful way. They were not meant to divide us, but to connect us, on different levels – with the more-than-human world, with other human beings and with our own deeper self.

The American Buddhist teacher and anthropologist Joan Halifax has pointed out that ‘myths and stories are the connective tissue between culture and nature, between self and other, between life and death that sew the worlds together in their telling. And in the protective and connective body of story the soul quickens. It comes alive.’<sup>25</sup> In her view, stories (and I think that includes also mythical stories) unify the inner and outer landscape, and they help us to initiate into ‘a spiritual relationship with Earth.’<sup>26</sup> In our everyday life the inner and outer world appear to be separate from each other. But when we manage to look more deeply into the nature of life, according to her, we find out that there are no separate realities.<sup>27</sup>



## 5 *Outdoor spirituality and belonging to the land*

Experiencing the balance of our own dual nature goes together with experiencing the Sacred quality of the entire natural world. That all beings, including ourselves, possess a Sacred quality has been known all over the world. It has existed as long as we felt that we inextricably belonged to the land around us – as long as we knew we fully depended on it for our survival and were deeply grateful for the gifts it kept giving to us. This sense of belonging and Sacredness was expressed in the East by the concept of the *Tao* and in the West by the concepts of *Heaven* or *Paradise*. Originally, in Western culture these concepts were not referring to places that only existed separately in a realm that began after this earthly life – in the so-called afterlife – or in some distant past that has forever eluded us. When we talk about *Heaven on Earth*, or about *the Earthly Paradise*, in fact we already assume that the real Heaven or Paradise must have existed or still does exist somewhere else, and that all that we can do is create a poor and probably illusionary imitation of it on planet earth. But then we forget that Paradise has truly existed, in ancient cultures that managed to build their culture on the principle of balanced duality, and that believed that we are able to enter Heaven before we die.<sup>28</sup> In Celtic culture this notion was expressed by the fact that life in this world was continually in contact with the underlying Otherworld, and that there was an intimate connection between the two, which could be experienced particularly well on certain times of the year, for instance during Samhain on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, and in certain Sacred places.

In fact, experiencing the presence of the Otherworld at specific places, experiencing that there is no real division between this material world and the invisible dimension from which this world has come into being, is what *animates* these places: it is what gives them a spirit or soul, what turns them into Sacred places. The Romans referred with the term *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, to this experience of ‘places of power’. This term expressed the fact that these places were alive, possessed a certain unique personality, and that particularly at these places the people were able to experience the ongoing communion between them, the surrounding landscape, and its underlying invisible dimension. On a larger, earthly scale, this kind of experience has also been known to humankind: it was common knowledge

in many cultures that the entire Earth had been born from an invisible dimension. Experiencing the presence of this underlying invisible dimension on an earthly scale was referred to with the term *Anima Mundi*, the soul of the world. In our modern world we might have forgotten that we actually need these kinds of experiences in the surrounding natural world to make us feel *at home* in the world, to feel that we are living in a world to which we belong – and that our sense of alienation and separation from the natural world has everything to do with the fact that we have lost this experience of the Sacred in the natural world.

As said, the Western concepts of Paradise and Heaven were originally referring to our relationship with the land around us, to our deep sense of belonging to it. We are fortunate that several indigenous peoples have managed to keep this wisdom alive in their culture. In this respect, Laurens van der Post has argued that the Kalahari Bushmen still had a strong sense of belonging, which was the result of their feeling of being known by the places where they happened to be: ‘It is not so much a conscious understanding as an act of man’s living participation in his own being, of observing and recognizing that although a thing is outside, it also represents something inside himself. (...) The reason it was so difficult for us to understand him was because he, as I knew him in the desert, felt known wherever he went. The stars knew him. (...) He felt known by the sun and the moon. Wherever he went he felt he belonged. But modern man has lost this feeling of being known.’ Van der Post thought it was very important that ‘we recover this sense of belonging and the responsibility as individuals of being a good neighbour to all forms of life.’<sup>29</sup>

This wisdom reveals that the Sacred – in its original form – is an expression of what I have called *outdoor spirituality*, a spirituality in which individual people experience their own lives being inextricably connected with all the other living beings around them – including fellow human beings, animals, plants, forests, rivers, mountains, Mother Earth, and eventually the entire Universe. In this outdoor spirituality the body plays an important role: this is of course our own living body, related to other living bodies, but these are all included in the larger body of the surrounding landscape. In some places the experience of outdoor spirituality might be more powerful than in others: these are the places that have been marked as

Sacred places. (I have distinguished the phenomenon of outdoor spirituality from the phenomenon of *indoor religion*, which refers to a phenomenon that has only risen to prominence when we began to lose our sense of being embedded in the natural world. I will discuss this phenomenon later, when I am going to talk about unbalanced dualism.)<sup>30</sup>

It is important to realize that the Sacred, as part of outdoor spirituality, is experienced in the first instance as being *immanent* in every life form, including of course ourselves. But this immanence of the Sacred does not mean that it is *only* present within every form. The boundaries of skins around all living beings are permeable, open to all kinds of influences. In this respect, there is an ongoing exchange between the inner and outer world of light, air, water, food, warmth, cold, and so on. But there are also less tangible exchanges of a psychological and spiritual nature. For that matter, there exists no artificial division yet between both: who we are is a reflection of where we are. This immanence of the Sacred implies an inextricable connection with the surrounding natural world.

When we experience ourselves as fully embedded in the surrounding landscape, the concept of *landownership* is meaningless. The original relationship has been the other way around: we feel we belong to the land and feel a deep connection to it. Indigenous people like the Native Americans have regularly expressed this position – to differentiate it from the Western notion of landownership that the European colonizers had introduced. Anthropologist Keith Basso has called this a *face-to-place* relationship between the people and the landscape. While researching the Apache community Cibecue he noticed that contact for the residents consisted of much more than a simple *face-to-face* contact. The local places also proved to have a special personal meaning for them, which was at least as important as the relationships between the people. By using the term *face-to-place* he wanted to stress that for these people the local places had a personality comparable to their own and that the relationship between them was mutual in nature.<sup>31</sup> The mutual nature of the relationship is part of the sense of belonging to the land. Understandably, a face-to-place contact with a specific place is necessary to make the experience of the animated quality of a place – the experience of the spirit of the place that I referred to earlier – possible.

## 6 *The essential gift quality of life*

When we experience our lives as being completely embedded in the surrounding natural world, we experience our own body as a gift from Mother Earth – something to be grateful for. And all the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat are then considered primarily as gifts as well. Hidden underneath the processing, the wrapping and the brand, all the food and drinks that we buy in a shop still possess this original gift quality. The major part of everything we drink and eat has been given to us for free by nature. All that we humans have really done, is adding a few little things of our own to the natural gifts – like putting seeds in the ground, caring for crops, optimizing the growth process, harvesting the crops, creating bottles and putting the drinks into them, transporting the products to a shop, the wages and rent of the shopkeepers, and so on –, a process in which we gradually have turned the gifts into commodities.

All the immaterial things that contribute to our growing process – the love, the help, the care and the attention we get – must be considered gifts as well. I think when it comes to the place of the gift element in human culture, the immaterial gifts have even preceded the material ones, and reach much deeper into who we actually are: we have started to cooperate with each other and to pay attention to each other's needs, and as a result of that spirit of cooperation and mutual care, we started giving things to each other. Perhaps even the opposition that we sometimes get can eventually be considered a gift. The people who turn their hatred towards us and initially seemed to trigger some negative responses in us, might at some point turn out to have offered an important contribution to the development of our consciousness and our growth process. In this respect, it makes sense not to judge people too early and even to make an attempt to love our enemies, as Jesus is supposed to have said two thousand years ago. Later I will come back to this interesting statement by Jesus.

When people realize the importance of the general gift quality of life, and of their own life in particular, they feel inclined to start giving gifts to other people, both immaterial gifts in the form of attention and care and material gift in the form of money, food and presents. As has been argued by many anthropologists, starting with Marcel Mauss, and followed by other researchers ((including Lewis Hyde, Jacques Godbout, Genevieve

Vaughan en Charles Eisenstein), the process of gift giving generates *reciprocity* and creates *bonds* between people, friendships – and eventually (as a lot of research in this field has shown) lies at the heart of the *cohesion* of human communities. By considering life as a gift, we experience a deep sense of *gratitude* for the simple fact of being alive.<sup>32</sup>

### 7 *Internal feminine power: being open, receptive and vulnerable*

Feminine power is the primary inner power, the internal power we are all born with. It is connected to a inner sense of authority: the inborn sense that no one else can really know how we are experiencing life; the inner voice that tells what step to take next. Writer and peace builder Scilla Elworthy has emphasized in her book *Power & Sex*, that the hara center is the original seat of our inner power, which she identifies as *feminine power* and is focused on being open and cooperative. She distinguishes this from the masculine form of external power, *power over*, which she also calls *domination power* and is focused on forcing others to do what you want them to do.<sup>33</sup> We must not forget, of course, that the distinction between *feminine* and *masculine* should not be confused with the difference between women and men: both women and men have feminine and masculine qualities in them. Anyway, it is clear that we are all – women and men – born with this feminine form of internal power, and that the masculine form of external power only starts manifesting itself in our lives in the years after we have been born.

As is indicated earlier, we are also born as open and receptive beings. In this state we are also *vulnerable beings* – beings that need to be treated with a lot of care. Although the women should not be equated with the feminine qualities in them, of course they have always had easier access to the feminine qualities in themselves, like caring for other beings. In our patriarchal society, men have tended to suppress these qualities in themselves. Perhaps this suppression is related to the fact that fetuses, of girls and boys, have initially all been female: the split off between female and male fetuses only happens after a few weeks when the Y-chromosome enters the scene, and female fetuses are transformed into male ones. So I think when men identify themselves strongly with an image of toughness and rationality, this might be the result of suppressing their female origin,

connected to giving care and daring to be soft and vulnerable. The American researcher Brené Brown has been advocating a lot for the appreciation of the element of vulnerability in our lives. She thinks it is very important that we do not suppress our vulnerability but keep cherishing it. It is, of course, not a coincidence that she pleads for this as a woman. In her view, we cannot be truly courageous without also showing our vulnerability. She has emphasized that in this regard *courage* must be clearly distinguished from *heroism*, which has always been closely connected to the suppression of vulnerability.<sup>34</sup>

### 8 *The reality of natural holarchies*

Not only human beings create different levels, differentiate and arrange them in an order. These levels exist all over the natural world. When our ancestors felt embedded in it, they acknowledged their presence – and when we feel embedded in it again, we can acknowledge their presence again, and sense that these levels are not ordered in a hierarchical way. In this regard, to make sense of these natural levels, I was helped a lot by the ideas of Arthur Koestler. He referred to these natural levels as *holarchies*, to distinguish them from the hierarchical levels that we artificially created in our human world. A holarchy consists of *holons*. A holon is always whole in itself but is simultaneously part of a larger holon. Examples of holarchies are: the natural levels in which atoms are part of a cell, cells are part of an organ, organs are part of an organism, and so on. This kind of ordering is not limited to the biological field. We are a whole as an individual but are simultaneously part of a larger whole, a community. And communities are yet again wholes in themselves and part of larger communities. In these levels there exist no exclusive higher or lower levels, but the levels are formed according to the principle of inclusion of the smaller in the larger, of presence of the smaller in the larger – and also the larger potentially in the smaller.<sup>35</sup>

The themes of the womb/matrix and the cell membrane, which I discussed earlier in the context of the growth process, are relevant here as well. You could say that in a healthy body, the atoms, cells and organs are all continually fed by larger matrices in which they are included, kept in a balanced state, are renewed when necessary, and that this whole balanced

system is generating our growth process. Not only around cells, but also around organs, organisms and environments there exist boundaries like the cell membranes, which are usually open to beneficial influences, and only shortly closed-off to keep out the harmful influences. As long as they can stay open and receptive most of the time, the natural levels – that together form a holarchical order – are functioning well.

### **Collective loss of balance**

As I have said earlier, for the beginning of the gradual collective changeover from a reality of balanced duality to a reality of unbalanced dualism we can point to a specific period in history, about 6000 years ago, and not coincidentally this has also been the period of the rise of patriarchy. A paradigm shift took place then, that I have called the *Patriarchal Shift*. It would take too much space to discuss the potential causes of this shift here (I have done that in my book *The Whole Story*), but it is a fact that it has affected all the fields that I have discussed above. Since that period, we have increasingly managed to make ourselves believe on a collective scale that we can actually separate our lives from the surrounding natural world and can build a human civilization independently from it. We managed to put ourselves in an elevated, egocentric position above the natural world – above the more-than-human world – and started to believe that from an ego-position in our head we could not only control our own body, but also other people, animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and so on. This resulted in a civilization that was built on a collectively shared sense of separation – separation from our own deeper being, creating an inner division. From this inner division we increasingly started to feel alienated from and opposed to our fellow human beings, animals, landscapes, the sky above us, and so on. In short, we increasingly started to feel excluded from the entire natural world around us.

But of course this natural world did not disappear, not in our own being and not around us. Our own body continued to be there, continued to make its presence felt. The other people, animals, landscapes, and so on, also continued to be there, kept confronting us with their presence. In our sense of separation, we could only respond by struggling against them, with all our might, projecting onto them everything we had suppressed in our own

being – casting, in a Jungian sense, our Shadow onto them. Of course, in such a situation is quite unbearable for anyone: we could not stand alone in this alienated way for too long, and therefore needed to cling to groups of likeminded people. We realized the relative safety of categories on different levels: from the small scale of families and friends to the large scale of entire nations. Our sense of separation had turned our balanced dual nature into a unbalanced dualistic nature. And it was necessarily driven by us-and-them thinking – by tension, conflict and struggle.

### **Individual loss of balance**

The loss of balance did not just happen collectively in the distant past: it has also happened in our individual lives. We all know that in our individual lives a sense of separation has gradually manifested itself; that this sense has fed the growth *of* and our identification *with* the ego, and that our ego has again increased our sense of separation. At a certain moment in our life we started to experience ourselves as a separate being, as separated from the surrounding natural world. We might not realize that our initial state was one of a balanced dual nature, and that this balance has made place for an unbalanced dualistic state. The ongoing change in ourselves from sleeping to waking to sleeping, the change from unconscious to conscious to unconscious, was initially accepted as an integral part of life. Initially we also felt fully embedded in the cyclical natural world around us.

The ego, that began to develop itself in the years after we were born, was originally meant to be a servant, part of a much larger and deeper sense of interconnected consciousness that centered in the hara/heart area. But just like has happened collectively a few thousand years ago, in our individual life we were also confronted with an ego explosion that has completely overwhelmed us. The balance was lost and our sense of identity shifted to the ego, to the head and more specifically to the left hemisphere of our brain. In fact, this dualistic unbalanced state in our individual lives was also affirmed by the collective context in which we grew up: the still dominant sphere of patriarchal culture that has always put the emphasis on developing our sense of separation and identifying ourselves with it.



## **Unbalanced dualism**

From the moment we lost our sense of being embedded in the natural world and it was replaced by a sense separation, also our dualistic mindset came into being. A human with this mindset never feels balanced and peaceful: he or she is always restless and conflict oriented. This mindset affects all the fields that I discussed earlier with regard to balanced duality. Below I will pay attention to the specific changes in these fields that have been caused by this dualistic thinking and action.

### *1 Denial and fear of death*

Although it might not be directly obvious, central in the dualistic mindset is the focus on the light side of life – on the daytime, on the summertime. A human with this mindset feels threatened by the dark side of life, which not only consists of the nighttime and the wintertime, but also includes death. He or she does his or her best to stay away from the dark side and denies the existence of death in the best way possible – but of course this is impossible. I think that the core of human depressions can be found in the ongoing threat of the dark side of life and the related fear of non-existence.

We have seen that during the corona crisis a lot of people started suffering from depressions. It is clear that they were more intensely confronted with their own individual lives, which also includes a confrontation with the dark side. Because many people died quite suddenly, and the virus has been very unpredictable in this regard – killing both the old and the young, the weak and the strong – everyone was confronted with his or her own mortality. Triggered by the knowledge that anyone could die from the virus in a short time, the presence of death could no longer be denied. And due to the fact that the virus spread more in the darker days of the wintertime, and all kinds of social activities had to be limited or even stopped completely, people had to spend a lot of time on their own or in a small company. In this context depressions could spread more widely and severely among the people.

In a way, the corona virus has done something that in the end might turn out to be beneficial to the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of humankind. By being confronted for longer periods with the presence of death all around us and the possibility of our own dying, we might be able

to change the unbalanced, dualistic tension between life and death into a more balanced duality again on a collective scale. I think that we are challenged by the corona crisis to become much more aware of our own mortality, to acknowledge death as an inextricable part of our life. This might eventually result in making our lives much richer, complete and meaningful, in a psychological and spiritual sense. I will return to this issue when I discuss the different ways in which we are restoring the balance.

I have pointed out earlier that death and the process of aging are closely associated phenomena. A fear of death goes together with a fear of aging: when we are afraid of death and the process of dying, understandably we don't want to get old, because in old age we come nearer to the inescapable end of our mortal life, to death. This fear of aging is quite widespread in Western culture: many people want to stay young as long as possible and put a lot of energy and time into avoiding getting old – by trying to hide wrinkles, getting Botox injections, putting a lot of money into plastic surgery and hair transplants, idealizing their own youth, clinging to the favorite music from decades ago, and so on. Most of these efforts to stay young are limited to changing the outer appearance. (This means, ignoring the fact that the process of really staying young is happening in our inner world: by continuing to grow inwardly, by continuing to develop, by daring to change. I will come back to this in the section below on restoring the balance). The fear of aging does not only lead to expensive efforts to keep ourselves externally young as long as possible, it has often also led to minimizing relationships with the elderly. When people are focused on staying young as long as they can, they do not think that there is anything beneficial, special or interesting about the process of aging, anything the younger people could learn something from: they associate getting old largely with getting more and more ailments and diseases, and finally, with dying. Therefore, to keep their identification with the young generation going, to keep being cheerful and enjoy life fully, they ensure that they are confronted with old people as little as possible.

## *2 Exclusion from the natural world*

When we have excluded ourselves from the natural world, from feeling embedded in it, we have left the principle of *Diversity & Inclusion* behind

us and we have started to subscribe to the principle of *Uniformity & Exclusion*. Then we limit our focus to solely being part of human society, and in this society we limit our focus further to being part of smaller groups of people. The principle of Uniformity & Exclusion means, for instance, that we strongly identify with a specific group of people, locally or nationally, with their ideas, and radically exclude people who don't fit the group identity. It means that we have cut ourselves off from our original state of balanced duality – from our roots.

It is not always realized that dualism can only exist in a worldview that is focused exclusively on human affairs – and thereby has also denied and excluded, perhaps unconsciously, the presence of the surrounding natural world, the more-than-human world. A dualistic mindset has become blind to the existence of the larger context of the Earth in which human life is happening and on which it depends. It takes this larger context for granted. But this doesn't take away the fact that this larger context is there all the time, exerting its influence anyway. And when this influence is clearly showing itself, like what is happening at the moment with the different manifestations of climate change, the dualistic mind tends to keep denying it as long as possible.

In our sense of separation, having lost touch with our balanced dual nature, we think in a dualistic way. We are driven towards polarization, to us-and-them thinking, and we want to bring this polarization to an end by fighting against it. In this mindset we deal with problems by fighting against them, by trying to eradicate them by the use of external force. From that approach we fight against cancer, fight against crime, we are engaged in war against drugs. We automatically place ourselves in an elevated position, identify ourselves with 'the good ones', oppose ourselves to some enemy that must be defeated – without acknowledging that the enemy within ourselves, the Jungian Shadow, needs to be dealt with first...

It is no coincidence that the word *uniform* is part of the concept of *uniformity*. We can see that people in the army, the doctors, the police, or in football teams all wear a uniform, so that they can be identified from without as belonging to a certain group. Some religious groups like Buddhist monks, orthodox Jews, or the Amish wear a kind of uniform as well. They all limit their sense of unity to a small group, to provide the

members some kind of security: they include certain people in their group to clearly exclude others. They also make themselves easily identifiable by the outer world. For groups like the police and the medics that can be handy, but in other cases this can be an important source of conflict. People with other uniforms, like we see in football teams or armies, experience the people with other uniforms as a competitor or even an enemy. The individual behind the uniform comes in second place. The uniform artificially creates differences between groups of people, differences that disappear when the uniform is taken off. Of course, underneath the uniform, the natural diversity has never gone away and is still present – a diversity which shows that he or she is still part of the natural world, and will always remain included in it.

### *3 Exclusion of the supernatural world*

It is perhaps not always clear that dualism subscribes to the materialistic view of life, which only accepts *certain* invisible forces to be part of nature: gravity, the electro-magnetic force, and the weak and strong nuclear force. Other forces like telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance, are not considered to be part of nature and are qualified as ‘supernatural’. Thereby they are excluded from the natural world. For dualistic-oriented minds the exclusion of these more mysterious forces needs to be confirmed and need to keep being identified as mere ‘nonsense’ on a regular basis. To me this partly explains the popularity of so-called *illusionists*. In the Netherlands illusionists like Victor Mids and Hans Klok are immensely popular. Illusionists are usually very pleasant, enjoyable and kind people, who can truly do amazing things that baffle the senses of observing audiences. They present us an apparently mysterious world that – according to their view – is in fact built on nothing but clever tricks by which people are fooled. By doing this, they – simultaneously, but probably unknowingly – discredit the existence of real powers like telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance. Indirectly they tell us these are all nonsense: don’t be fooled by them, there is a logical explanation for them.

That the materialist worldview is driven by a dualistic mindset that is particularly focused on discrediting the ‘supernatural’, is more clearly shown by the response of materialist scientists to scientific researchers who

dare to cross the boundaries of their scientific field and expand it to include the ‘supernatural’ once again – in fact, a restoration of the original position. Well-known are the rejections by materialist scientists of Rupert Sheldrake’s research into the telepathic capacities of humans and animals.<sup>36</sup> In this respect the ongoing attacks on former surgeon Pim van Lommel by two well-known Dutch science-philosophers can be mentioned as well. These philosophers are passionate supporters of materialist science, but apparently not of scientists who dare to step outside its conventional framework. Van Lommel has been researching near-death experiences for many years and in his books and articles he has been pointing out the relevance of these experiences, because they give us a better understanding of the nature of our consciousness. The attacks by these philosophers are not just directed at Van Lommel’s research, but in particular also at him personally.<sup>37</sup> You may wonder why they feel so threatened by Van Lommel’s research, when the materialist view of science is still mainstream in the academic world, supported by many scientists. Knowing how vicious the reaction from within the scientific world can be, it is understandable that many scientists choose to play it safe (at least until their pension), and do not touch topics that are considered ‘controversial’. For instance, most scientists do not dare to research a phenomenon like the crop circles and take the mysterious, non-human origin of some of them seriously, because they know a priori that they will be fiercely attacked by the materialist-oriented scientific community. Behind all of this, one can feel a strong dualistic urge of materialist scientists to discredit the ‘supernatural’, to guard the boundaries of materialist science, to raise thick walls around its fortress and keep defending it with all their might.

#### *4 The birth of (linear) history*

The start of the history of the Western world is still equated by many researchers with the birth of Western civilization. This happened to be also the period when we started to separate ourselves, individually and collectively, from the natural world. It was the period in which humanity was confronted with an ego explosion, which also generated dualistic thinking in the minds of the people. So the phenomenon of history is closely associated with the dualistic mindset.

Historical thinking was also linear thinking, following development from A to B to C, and was gradually replacing the cyclical thinking of mythology. In the process of changing over to historical thinking, mythology was also devalued – a devaluation that has lasted up to the present. When we consider something false, a lie, a deception, misleading, far from true, many people still say it is a myth. This is the result of putting an exclusive emphasis on historical thinking and on creating historical awareness.

Historians have usually assumed that their field of study is limited to the human world, to describing and mapping the developments in the human world. The study of developments within the natural world is left to other scientific disciplines, like biology and geology. Beside the fact that these days there are a lot of exchanges of knowledge between different scientific disciplines, that interdisciplinary research does take place a lot and also books have been published that put the development of human society in an ecological frame, I think the scientific discipline of history itself is still not really involved with describing developments of a large field which includes both the human and the surrounding natural world, and neither with creating a link between these two worlds.

This means that the scope of history is also much more limited than that of mythology, which after all has always been involved with creating connections between the human world and the more-than-human world, in which it is embedded and which extend far into the cosmos – with giving meaning to human life by placing it in this larger context. Even human history on a world scale has always limited its focus: as many feminists have shown, world history has primarily been concerned with writing the story of men, with *His Story* – the story of patriarchy that started about 6000 year ago to which I have referred earlier. This *His Story* has even limited itself to just telling the story of a small selection of these men: the ones that had been in power through the centuries and were living in countries that were considered part of Western civilization. For a long time, not only the contribution by women has been largely excluded from history, but also the contribution to it by ‘black’ people, people with a migration background, and by people from indigenous cultures.

There is another limitation that should be mentioned here. Since there have been nations with borders around them, the historians within these nations have been involved with limiting the scope of history even further: they have been writing national histories – histories that had to make sense of the past of a particular nation and its inhabitants. In these national histories that national borders around the countries play an important role. Often, they have only existed for a hundred or two hundred years, but their existence was projected onto a past of a few thousand years or even onto a much longer period, extending into prehistory.

When people realized that human life did not start with the birth of history, the concept of *prehistory* was devised – referring to the period that preceded history. Prehistory is supposed to be of equal value to history, but understandably in history the emphasis has always been on the historical period. And whatever fell under the heading of prehistory was considered primarily a preparation period for the period in which the real important events were supposed to have taken place: in history. In the minds of most historians, the field of history and prehistory are therefore not really considered equivalent. They might not be aware of their dualistic mindset, but it has been responsible for thinking in terms of historical developments in which the human world has existed separately from the natural world. Therefore, quite automatically a dualistic tension has been created between the field of history and prehistory – comparable to the tension between the developed world and developing countries, between being civilized and being primitive or savage: wherever people are still living in ‘prehistoric’, or ‘primitive’ conditions, we as ‘civilized’ citizens of the Western world think that we need to help them to get rid of their awful conditions. In our dualistic mindset we are convinced that these prehistoric, primitive people might have little or nothing of importance to contribute to our civilization: they can only learn from us.

##### *5 The rise of indoor religions and the desacralization of nature*

The process of losing our feeling of being fully embedded in the natural world and of changing our experience of reality from balanced duality to an unbalanced dualism, was accompanied by removing the Sacred quality from the natural world. From then on, the experience of the Sacred became more

and more connected to the interior of religious buildings: temples, synagogues, mosques, cathedrals or churches. It marked a profound change from *outdoor spirituality* to *indoor religions*. It is important to realize that these religions were created from a dualistic mindset, in which the Sacred and the profane had become exclusive fields that existed absolutely separate from each other and in opposition to each other. The Sacred was now present within the walls of a religious building, from which contact could be made with God in Heaven, and the profane existed outside of it, primarily in the natural world. The beginning of dualistic indoor religions can be traced back to Sumerian culture. Through Persian Zoroastrianism, in which the struggle between the absolute Good against the absolute Bad was central to its view, in a later period dualistic thinking had a major impact on the formation of the monotheistic religions of the Judeo-Christian heritage.

Importantly, this change was also a change from pre-patriarchal spirituality to patriarchal religious experience. In pre-patriarchal spirituality there is a direct connecting to the Sacred through individual experience. Within this spiritual world there might be spiritual elders, medicine women and men, or shamans in the community, who have easier access to the Sacred dimension and are more aware of the scope of its power. But in general, all people in the community are supposed to have direct access to spiritual experiences. Perhaps with the exception of the mystics, in the patriarchal religions for most of the people in the community their religious experience primarily takes place within a context of the hierarchical institution to which they are connected. In this institution, the contact with their God (who resides in Heaven) is primarily channeled through and interpreted by a selected group of religious leaders. The people of the community can trust on their belief in the doctrines of their religion, without necessarily having had any personal experience of the Sacred themselves.

## 6 *Fighting dragons and searching for Paradise*

Being confronted with the power of the nature – that is, both with our own human nature, which manifests itself through our body, and with the natural world around us – can be quite overpowering. It can remind us of the fact that we are not really in charge and that we are an inescapable part of something that is much larger than we are. But since we have separated



ourselves from the natural world, we have not accepted that reality and wanted to be in control of it all – of both our own small body and the virtually limitless body of the surrounding landscape in which our own bodies are embedded. Thereby we have initiated a struggle against something that is larger than ourselves. That is also the moment when the mythical struggles against *dragons* came to life! So mythology did not completely disappear from the scene with the rise of history! And as long as we refused to give up our urge to control nature, the threatening dragons have kept manifesting themselves. They keep manifesting because the large body of the landscape can never be kept in control by small beings like ourselves, who are part of this landscape. We witness an important natural law at work here, which says that the larger can never be controlled by the smaller. We can also observe that unfortunately in the Western world – due to the persistent imperialistic urge through the centuries to rule the world – for a long time we have not really understood the power of this law.

The power of the natural world, with its Sacred quality, never disappeared, and keeps manifesting itself – albeit in a negative way – in the form of threatening dragons. All throughout the history of Western civilization these dragons have kept appearing, and they have been known under various names. In Sumerian culture there has been the Goddess Tiamat, in the Bible there has been Leviathan, in ancient Greece there has been Python, and in Christian culture several nameless dragons have kept manifesting their power. The power of the snake that seduced Eve in the Genesis story, and the later depiction of the Virgin Mary suppressing a snakelike creature under her feet, can be put into this context as well. The dragons needed masculine Gods, mythical Heroes and Christian Saints to be able to confront and suppress their power – to which I will pay more attention in a later section.

Besides the negative charge of the dragons, and the separation from the surrounding landscape and the urge to control it from without, the power of the landscape also continued in a more positive sense: it generated a vague sense of loss, of having lost access to Paradise and a perpetual restlessness that drove people to go searching for this lost Paradise, that was assumed to still exist somewhere on the planet. A large part of the inspiration of the European colonizers, from Columbus on, was to find the lost Paradise. And

regularly the colonists thought they found the lost Paradise among the indigenous peoples they came across in 'the New World'. But in their dualistic mindset, they could not help shifting between considering them sometimes noble savages and sometimes savage beasts. This was a process in which the power of the European heritage they had brought with them, quickly gained prominence again. From an imagined sense of superiority, they could justify the domination and control of the indigenous populations, which – as is well-known – has nearly always resulted in the exploitation and destruction of their culture.

### 7 *The split between mind and matter*

Since we have the state of balanced duality collectively behind us, culture has been swinging between the exclusive emphasis on mind and the exclusive emphasis on matter. In the monotheistic, indoor religions the emphasis was laid on the power of the human mind, which was accompanied by a suppression of the material world – of the natural world around us and the human body as well. With the rise of materialist science, which manifested itself in particular since the period of the Enlightenment, the focus shifted to the material world, and the realm of the mind was degraded to a subordinate position: consciousness was considered to be a mere product of the brain cells. This shift of focus between mind and matter showed that the split between mind and matter was a manifestation of unbalanced dualism – the result of dualistic thinking. Both when the focus was put on the mind by the monotheistic religions and when the focus was put on matter by materialist science, the impression was created that there was no underlying dualistic struggle. But we all have been able to witness that the dualistic basis quickly came to the foreground when people dared to challenge *the belief system* of the monotheistic religions or *the knowledge system* of materialist science. In that sense they have shown not to differ that much: the dogma needed to be defended at all cost. What also did continue when the focus on the mind in monotheistic religions shifted to the focus on matter in materialist science, is the evident *supremacy or dominance of human beings* in relation to the natural world, and within human society the evident *supremacy or dominance of (white) men*.

The split between mind and matter has opened the way to experiencing all life in a *secular* way – devoid of any Sacred quality. The secular experience of life could only manifest itself, when we had managed as a society to imagine ourselves to be able to live outside the natural world, in a society that could exist independent from the natural, more-than-human world – with its own rules and laws. The process of desacralization had already started – as I have pointed out earlier – when the monotheistic religions removed experience of the Sacred from the natural world outside and was moved indoors, to the space within the building of the temple, church or mosque. When the materialist view of science spread across the world, also the indoor experience of the Sacred lost its meaning. In the worldview of materialist science, the Sacred did not exist at all – and has never existed. In this worldview, in which matter is considered the basis of everything, there is only room left for the secular: life as a whole has then become a secular affair.

#### 8 *Masculine external power, hierarchy and heroism*

When I talked earlier about the inner power that we are all born with, I pointed out that this is qualified as a feminine power – which both women and men possess. When we separate ourselves from the natural world, put ourselves in an imagined position outside it, another kind of power manifests itself, external power, called *power over* by feminist thinkers, which is qualified as a masculine form of power. It is connected to the presence of external authorities, to the urge to rule over others and the demand to follow and hold on to the apparent security of someone else's rules and guidelines. This form of power implies hierarchical structures of organization, that we can witness everywhere around us in our society. We should never forget that we are dealing here with a secondary form of power, a substitute for the loss of our inner power, our inner sense of authority, the silencing of our inner voice. Interestingly, the American psychologist Dacher Keltner has argued, in his book *The Power Paradox*, that the external form of power over other people is actually a loss of real power.<sup>38</sup> I think this real power is the inner, feminine form of power that resides in us all. This is something that every president, political leader, or person at the top of a hierarchical organization, should be aware of.

When people today focus completely on having and extending power over others, they step directly into the footsteps of the mythical figures that were struggling with dragons. They get involved with what Jungians have called *ego inflation* (although Jung himself never used the term ‘ego’). The American mythologist Joseph Campbell realized how strongly this concept is connected to the mythical dimension of life. Therefore, in this respect he spoke about *mythic inflation*. Campbell has described mythic inflation as follows: ‘an exaltation of ego in the posture of a god which has been a chronic disease of rulers ever since the masters of the art of manipulating men contrived to play the role of incarnate god (...)’<sup>39</sup> According to the Jungian researchers Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, it indicates that ‘individuals take upon themselves the powers and attributes that, they believe, belong to a deity, even to the extent of believing the deity is incarnated in their own persons or that they are enacting the will of the deity.’<sup>40</sup> So this term refers to the fact that someone has started to identify with the godly realm, with the result that his or her (undeveloped) ego is blown up to huge proportions. As Keltner has observed correctly, in this way only the loss of real inner power is masked.

In a previous section I discussed the manifestations of threatening dragons, due to the human urge to control the natural world. This is where external, masculine power is coming on the scene. To fight and slay dragons a huge force is required – a force that only Gods, heroes and some saints possess. These dragon slayers are known under many different names. The God Marduk slew the Goddess Tiamat, Apollo struggled with Python, Jahweh fought against Leviathan, and Saint George and Saint Michael fought against nameless dragons. In this respect we can also think about Saint Patrick, who reputedly freed Ireland from snakes.

The masculine heroes were all presenting themselves as *invulnerable* human beings, being tough enough to be able to slay a threatening dragon. This toughness is a manifestation of the mind that is closed-off; that is in a protective state, in the fight-or-flight mode, with even the second flight part excluded as a way of escape. The hero has to keep fighting until he finally wins, until he is victorious. But this hero might actually have put his state of invulnerability so much on the foreground just because he needed to protect an extremely vulnerable being underneath, the real being that had been

since the day he was born and even continued to be, but wanted badly to keep out of the public eye at all cost, to prevent himself from being mentally or spiritually hurt. So, to a large extent the hero might actually be qualified as a mere artificial creation by the undeveloped ego, that he might manage to keep up as long as he is in the public eye, but definitely has to let go as soon as he takes off his helmet and his uniform, and lays down his shield and his weapons. The hero wanted to be like a God, to be a mythical creature, but all he has achieved is a disproportionately large ego as a result of mythic inflation. Whoever gets to see the vulnerable human who has been hiding beyond the mask of invulnerability?

### *9 The origin of private landownership and the wasteland*

Unbalanced dualism generated a loss of our sense of belonging, of feeling deeply connected to the place we are living. The roles were reversed, and the way to private landownership was made possible. Due to the patriarchal notion that we human beings are separated from the natural world around us and are superior to it, we started to put ourselves first and to believe that the land actually belongs to us. The anthropocentric worldview and the phenomenon of private landownership go well together.

The abstract concept of private landownership is superimposed on the concrete reality of the land and doesn't need direct contact with the land – having been present in it and having gotten oneself personally familiar with it. Legally registered possessions of land registered can be sold to other people without having the actual land itself involved. But possessions of land can also be claimed through other means, for instance, by theft and warfare, through the use of external power, *power over*. This principle has eventually led to possessions of land ending up in the hands of the materially rich, the ruling class, thereby leaving the majority of people materially poor, with no or hardly any possession of land. In the history of the Western world, we have seen that this uneven and unjust state of affairs has gradually become a reality everywhere, and on different levels – from the individual level of ownership by landlords to the collective level of landownership by the state.

The loss of our sense of belonging to the land, the rise of private landownership, and the dualistic thinking and behavior related to it, have

truly contributed to turning the original paradisiacal world into a wasteland. This wasteland featured already in the medieval Arthurian stories about the wounded Fisher King, and the search for the Grail. Originally, when the Fisher King had managed to rule the land and his people by *servicing* them, the land had been fertile and the people had been healthy and prosperous. When he had stopped serving the land and his people, the land had also lost its fertility and his people had lost their prosperity and health. This situation was symbolized by the wounded Fisher King. As long as the visiting Grail knights had failed to ask the right question and thereby his wound was not healed, the land remained infertile and the inhabitants kept suffering as well. Healing the wasteland was equated with finding the mysterious Grail. It is not hard to see in what sense we are dealing at the moment with the difficult task of healing the rulers, ourselves and thereby also the wasteland.

### **Dualities that have turned into dualisms**

As soon as we have separated ourselves – collectively and individually – from the natural world and have started to identify ourselves with our sense of separation, with the undeveloped ego, we change the existing balanced dualities into unbalanced dualisms. And, in the process, we have also reversed their order: in our patriarchal world we put the daytime first and the nighttime second; the summer first and the winter second; men first and women second; masculine values first and feminine values second; competition first and cooperation second; and thinking first and feeling second.

In our sense of separation, we have not been able to value both sides equally; we have not been able to recognize their equivalence and complementary value. We projected our hierarchical way of thinking on these transformed dualities: daytime was put on top of the hierarchy and nighttime in a subordinate position underneath it. In a similar sense, summer was valued higher than winter, men higher than women, masculine values higher than feminine values, competition higher than cooperation, and thinking higher than feeling. Thereby we have also put them, probably without realizing it, in opposition to each other.

And, as has generally been the case with the creation of hierarchical orders: order had to be maintained by people, and by laws and regulations

made by people. In our sense of separation, we had come to believe that order will always fall apart into disorder, if we don't do anything and just let it be. Therefore, it was assumed that this order needed to be artificially kept intact by a system of outside-inside and top-down control. In the original state of balanced duality, this kind of control did not exist, and was not necessary, as in the self-organization principle of nature, the order manifested itself naturally from within – from the inside to the outside and from the bottom to the top, in other words bottom-up.

### **Newly created dualisms**

Through our sense of separation, we have created new dualisms as well: we put the human realm in opposition to the animal realm, reality in opposition to fantasy, civilization in opposition to barbarism, history is in opposition to prehistory. We artificially create the abstract and patriarchal concept of the Fatherland, with a border, flag and anthem, and put it in opposition to the actual, living and borderless land of the Motherland. In our sense of separation, we create a map and, unfortunately, confuse it with the territory, the land itself.

Also, here we can see that, when we are trapped in the dualistic mindset, we need to order the world artificially in a hierarchical way. The opposed sides are not equivalent to each other. One is put on a higher level, and is supposed to exert the control over the other side in an outside-inside, top-down way. From within our sense of separation we evidently place humans above animals; what we assume to be reality above fantasy; ourselves as developed, civilized humans above the uncivilized others, including our 'primitive' ancestors and the people today about whom we think that they still need to go through a development before they can reach our civilized level; the abstract Fatherland above the actual ground under our feet, the actual sky above our head and the surrounding landscape, which together as a whole form the Motherland.

### **Suppressing the power of balanced duality**

As said earlier, in nature there is one important law that says that the smaller cannot control the larger. And it is impossible to keep going artificially against this natural law. But that is what has been the case with

dualisms. To keep dualistic external power, power over, going, it needs to be re-established and reconfirmed all the time. It cannot be maintained without a large police force and army to keep it continually in check – by continually using propaganda, brainwashing and even violence to spread fear. The natural power of balanced duality, of order that organizes itself spontaneously from within, always keeps returning, and that feels very threatening from a separated position – indeed, like a threatening dragon that cannot be killed.

Therefore, to maintain the dualistic way of creating order in the human world, the power of balanced duality must be suppressed all the time. In the first place this happens within our own being. In this respect I have referred earlier to the ideas about our dual nature by the anthropologist Jan van Baal and by the psychologist Carl Jung – and besides that also to the way that this dual nature has manifested itself through the two hemispheres of our brain and the distinction between our heart and the brain in our head.

All these different ideas indicate that both the state of balanced duality and the one of unbalanced dualism also exist in our own being. In the growth process of our first years, when the ego starts developing in us, we gradually lose sight of the fact that we actually possess a balanced dual nature. Then we start believing that the state of unbalanced dualism is a reflection of who we are. We begin to think that we are really superior to the natural world around us; that we are really separated from other living beings; that all talk about the supernatural is mere nonsense; that we have truly and indefinitely progressed towards a secular world; that mind is unrelated to matter; that ideas about the existence a paradisiacal world are fanciful illusions; that patriarchal and hierarchical relationships have been around since the dawn of humanity; and that we as humans have basic right to landownership.

But we are not superior to the surrounding natural world. We never have been, and never will be. We have always been, and still are, an inextricable part of it, fully embedded in its context. And we are not even a ruler, from within our head, over our own body. The natural world is larger than we are. As said, there is a natural law, which says that the smaller cannot control or dominate the larger. We cannot keep deviating from this law forever, and there is a lot of hope in that notion.



## **Restoring the balance**

I have paid attention to the various fields that are affected by balanced duality and unbalanced dualism to show that separating ourselves from the cycles of the natural world, and normalizing our sense of separation, have had a huge impact on our life. It truly caused a paradigm shift that changed the entire course of our civilization. To restore the balance involves a similar paradigm change that consists of changes which are all interrelated, affecting each other. When I discussed the different fields that affected balanced duality, I have already shown that there is a growing awareness in our time of the importance of this balanced duality. I have done this, for instance, by paying attention to the research into the field of gift giving, and into the difference between internal and external power. In that sense our ancient, pre-patriarchal story is becoming a respected part of the new story that will help us to survive and grow further, individually and collectively. Here I will pay attention to some of the specific changes that we can all witness around us (when we take a good look around us) and that are going to help us to fully restore the balance.

### *1 Re-acquainting ourselves with our interconnected side*

As said above, in our dualistic mindset we have lost sight of the state of balanced duality in ourselves – the state in which the part of ourselves that feels embedded in the natural world is still on the foreground. Without first starting to realize again that this balanced duality is really an important part of who we are, no restoration process is ever going to succeed. We do not have to get rid of the ego to become aware of this again. That is impossible: we need the power of our ego during our entire life, but we have to free it from the prison of its undeveloped state, so that it can acknowledge its original role of being a servant to life again. When we manage to develop our ego, and thereby manage to let it become a supporter and inspirer of our growth process, our left hemisphere of the brain will become a servant to the right hemisphere again and our head as a whole must will become a servant to the heart again.

Of course, we will experience some inner resistance. The undeveloped ego will protest and want to retain its position of power. By keep practicing openness and honesty towards ourselves and others, we are able to free ourselves gradually from our inner prison. When we manage to reopen the doors that our undeveloped ego had closed off, to break down some of the artificial boundaries that we have created in this process, and thereby to reacquaint ourselves with the natural openness that has been given to us at birth, we have individually created for ourselves the opportunity to able to grow further, psychologically and spiritually. However individual this growth process might appear to be, by awakening the deeper interconnected side of our own being, our worldview expands more and more towards the environment, and we feel increasingly connected to the human world and the larger more-than-human world around us.

## *2 Dealing with the many-headed crisis*

So I think that we should not put a hold on our individual development, that we must not give up our individuality, and radically change over to identifying with some collective group. When we start identifying with a collective group from a dualistic mindset all at once, it is likely that the identification with this collective only serves to enlarge the power of our undeveloped ego. It is important to be aware of this with regard to dealing with the crises that we are facing today.

As we all know, we are witnesses all kinds of crises in the world around us: a financial crisis, an economic crisis, a gender crisis, a religious crisis, an identity crisis, and, of course, a corona crisis being part of a larger health crisis, a racial crisis and an ecological crisis. In my view, they are all manifestations of a much deeper *spiritual crisis* which is related to the entire course of Western civilization. We can see that people are dealing with it in two major different ways. Either we can see that this larger crisis actually offers us a huge, unprecedented challenge – a challenge to transform our society into a sustainable and just society in which diversity is acknowledged as essential for culture and in which human society is acknowledged to be part of the more-than-human world. I can see that fortunately many people have started to recognize this challenge.

But unfortunately, we can also respond to this crisis by denying that it is actually there and by remaining stuck in ‘the security’ of the dualistic mindset of the undeveloped ego – fiercely resisting any change and responding with denial and fear to any major call for worldwide change. Then we are inclined to feel attracted to and to start identifying strongly with one particular form of collective group-thinking that promises to offer easy solutions – the easy solutions offered by various forms of fundamentalism, populism, polarization and the creation of scapegoats. We can see examples everywhere around us how these extreme forms manifest themselves in various ways: from large protest demonstrations against government policies to football hooligans creating havoc and destruction, to bomb attacks and shootings, creating many human casualties.

Actually, it should perhaps not be a surprise that the people who do see a huge challenge in the current spiritual crisis and publicly expose their inner vision of transformation – in other words, the people of the first category –, are considered the most threatening ‘group’ to the people with enlarged ego’s. In their view, they are probably the most dangerous dragons to whom they must point their arrows and swords. It has happened before in history, but not on the worldwide scale that we are confronted with today. But because we are dealing with a crisis on a worldwide scale, the old way of simply slaying a few threatening dragons won’t work any longer. We have entered a time in which we have all to start *befriending our dragons*. It is true that the people who see an enormous challenge in the current crisis are very diverse; that they are many different expressions of individual growth that might seem unconnected to each other. Therefore, they might appear rather weak and easy targets in the eyes of the people who think they have found security for themselves in group identification. But I am sure that this diversity and individuality eventually will turn out to be the stronger power.

### *3 Going through an awakening process*

To solve the various crises that humanity is facing at the moment, we tend to turn to the scientific specialists for help. They are getting involved in extensive research and they publish their results – in the hope that with the public presentation of these results the crisis will eventually be solved. We are told to distrust other sources than the scientific ones and to put all our

trust in science. During the corona crisis this conviction was emphasized regularly: we were told that we fully depend on the knowledge of the virologists and their creation of vaccines to solve this crisis. We were advised to put no trust in people who operated outside the scientific field, and that among these people conspiracy theories were spreading across the world.

In dealing with the climate crisis – which we have been doing for a few decades but could have started even much earlier when we had collectively taken the first warning in the 1960's more seriously – we have seen, however, that presentations of the research results in the media and at conferences have not yet brought about a fundamental change. For several decades we are confronted now with quantitative scientific reports about the melting ice caps and the dramatic effects of climate change on the weather patterns on a worldwide scale. It is obvious that the publication and presentation of the scientific reports, however important they are, in themselves have not generated the necessary fundamental change. 'Emotional' actions like those inspired by Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion, or Jane Goodall's worldwide actions with her Roots & Shoots organization, appealing to people's feelings of the heart, have done more than the conferences on which the latest research results are presented.

When it comes down to our conventional way of trying to solve the current crises by limiting ourselves to technology and money, I have to think of the wisdom in the children's rhyme of Humpty Dumpty: 'Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, all the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again.' The materialist scientists and the politicians following in their footsteps are still acting very much like all the king's horses and all the king's men. When Albert Einstein famously stated that 'we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them', he criticized the way we take for granted that materialist scientists are going to solve our crises. I can imagine that scientists and politicians do not like to hear this. It is understandable that they do not like to associate themselves with creating the crises that humanity is facing at the moment. But when we limit science to the materialist version that has risen since the Enlightenment and still dominates the academic world, we should know that from the beginning it

has always backed up the exploitation of the material world to make human life more comfortable and has offered the technology to make this possible. If in our approach to climate change we stick to a materialist approach to life, indeed we attempt to solve the problem with the same kind of thinking that has created it.

With regard to solving the crises, however, there is a growing *awareness* that we must radically change our ways, if we want to survive as a species. This awareness is not generated by scientific thinking, by left hemisphere analysis: it rises directly from our hearts. Returning – or better: moving onwards – to the reality of a balanced dual nature, towards living from within the Tao, is not simply generated by an accumulation of knowledge. As already pointed out earlier, from the position of dualistic thinking we can never rediscover this lost state of balanced dual nature. Something else must happen: *experience* is needed, a complete *transformation* of our consciousness, going through an awakening process, healing a deeply wounded being – in short, nothing less than another paradigm change.

The English psychologist Steve Taylor has written a few very interesting books about the importance of what he has called *awakening experiences* – experiences in which we wake up from the sleep of our ego. These experiences are usually of a temporary nature, but they can result in a more permanent state of *wakefulness*. In this state human consciousness is completely transformed and accordingly people experience life in a completely different way as well. In the transformation process, they seem to have rediscovered and reevaluated the deeper interconnected side of their dual nature, which has inspired them to start living a much more balanced life. Taylor believes that due to the fact that these experiences appear to happen more frequently in our time, they point to a collective shift that is taking place in our consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4 *Healing ourselves*

To restore the balance, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of what being embedded in dual nature – of ourselves and of the natural world around us – actually entails, and what have been the consequences of disrespecting this inescapable reality. In this respect, it is important to realize that it is not the planet that needs to be healed, as some people still

seem to think. No, it is our own sense of separation that needs to be healed – and in this healing process, we will experience that the resilient and very patient planet, Mother Earth, has never lost Her power as a major contributor to this healing process. The wasteland is healed by healing ourselves.

Just like we possess an inner capacity for growing that is active in us all the time during our life, we also possess an inner healing capacity. We are continually pulled towards a state of balance: our white blood cells work continually to keep our body relatively free from disease and our sleep is largely a healing process. We actively resist the healing process through stress, ongoing conflict, not taking enough rest, eating the wrong food, taking too much alcohol and too many drugs, sticking to dualistic thinking and to fight-or-flight responses.

Although many people still believe that a doctor will cure their diseases, the German musician, theologian and doctor Albert Schweitzer, who worked for many years in Africa, had already pointed out long ago that we can really only heal ourselves (and he was definitely not the first one to have noticed; his mind was open to an ancient insight). When medical researcher Norman Cousins asked him to explain the cures of witch doctors in Africa, he said: ‘The witch-doctor succeeds for the same reason all the rest of us succeed. Each patient carries his own doctor inside him. They come to us not knowing that truth. We are at our best when we give the doctor that resides within each patient a chance to go to work.’<sup>42</sup> This kind of inner healer does not just heal our body, but also our mind and spirit. But, as Schweitzer said, we must give him or her a chance to go to work. And for that we must acknowledge first that this healer is actually present in our own being.

Of course, we must cherish and respect the results of scientific research and the growing body of scientific knowledge. But what is the value of this knowledge when we don’t understand it or do not trust it? We have seen during the corona crisis what can happen when people do not understand or trust the scientific knowledge anymore – perhaps because it is not explained sufficiently, because there is too much conflicting information going around, or because it is all still new and largely unknown for the scientists as well. Scientific knowledge will only become really valuable to us, when

we have also *recognized it as truthful or trustable* at a deep level of knowing in us – when we have managed to make this knowledge our own.

### 5 *Accepting the presence of death, night and winter*

When I discussed the denial of death above, I already pointed out that the current corona crisis, due to the fact that all of us could die from the virus, might have a beneficial effect – in the sense of collectively accepting the presence of death as an inextricable part of our life and helping us to return us to a life of balanced duality. One of the major ways that is helping us to accept the presence of death in our time are the increasing number of (reports of) near-death experiences, and the serious research that has been done on it. The people that have had them, have often completely lost their fear of death – and in the process are often healed from their sense of separation as well. The near-death experiences do not only help the people who have had them, but also the people who read the reports or listen to them and take them seriously. This gives them also the opportunity to accept the presence of death, as being an integral, unavoidable part of life – being a part of life in general, and even more importantly, being a part of their own life.

In recent years more and more impressive reports are published of people who have gone through a transforming near-death experience themselves. In this respect, the reports by Anita Moorjani and Eben Alexander have made a great impression on me.<sup>43</sup> The people who have had those kinds of experiences, have had the privilege of paying a visit to ‘the other side’. Frequently their outlook on life is completely transformed by it. As said, they usually have completely lost their fear of death. They have come to realize that – indeed – death is not the end. These experiences seem to have the power to reawaken people to their original state of balanced duality, with the result that – after they have managed to understand what has happened to them and to integrate the experience into their life – they feel completely embedded in the surrounding more-than-human world again. In their hearts they know that from this position they can also contribute to the creation of a more beautiful world. They have rediscovered (and experience) that the essence of life is to love and care for others. And

they know now as well that this care is not limited to the human world, but extends to all life on our planet.

Interestingly, Steve Taylor, the psychologist to whom I have referred already a few times in this article, has shown that these life-changing transformations can also be triggered by other kinds of experiences that have confronted people with their own mortality. Near-death experiences occupy an important place in these, but they can, for instance, also be triggered by getting an incurable disease, by having experienced a serious accident, or by being confronted by loss through the death of someone who has been dear – like a partner, a family member, or a good friend. Taylor has shown that the *trauma* and *turmoil* that is caused by these kinds of experiences has the potential in them to transform one's life completely. It can generate temporal awakening experiences, but in many cases it has even lead to a radical and permanent transformation of one's consciousness and personality to a new state of wakefulness.<sup>44</sup> As I have mentioned above, according to Taylor these awakening experiences and the transformation to a state of wakefulness are also significant on a collective level: in his view, they point to a general transformation of human consciousness.

Earlier I have pointed to the connection between death, aging and the night- and wintertime. We can see that in our time the acceptance and appreciation is increasing in all these fields. Let me start with aging. We can witness all around us an increased attention to and care for older people, and a reappraisal of their contribution to society. In this respect, it is significant, that when the corona crisis hit the world, in many countries the authorities evidently put the care for the older people high on the agenda. The fragile health of the older people, their vulnerability and bigger risk to get the virus, in comparison to the younger people, were considered more important than the economy, which was completely disrupted by lockdown measures. The older people were the first to get the opportunity to get vaccinated, and the young people were told that their freedom was limited to protect the older people. Of course, it is also true, that with the lockdowns, breathing machines on the IC's and the vaccination programs a lot of energy was put into delaying the moment of death as long as possible. But in a general sense, it was regularly pointed out that the underlying intention of all the measures and freedom restrictions was not self-interest, but attention and



care for the other. As a footnote, it can be added here that the growing massive protests have also shown, that apparently not everyone has managed yet to put the attention and care for the other central in their lives... So, in this respect, there is still some work to be done...

The acceptance of death is also closely connected to the acceptance of the nighttime and the wintertime. I have noticed that in our time there is also an increased focus on the periods of the night and the winter, which initially might not seem as attractive as the daytime and the summer. But when we put our serious attention to them and learn how to appreciate them, they will eventually contribute to giving us a more balanced life. With regard to the nighttime I can refer to the research by Clark Strand about his experience of being awake at night, the importance of this experience for our ancestors and for us today.<sup>45</sup> In the Netherlands the writer, poet and performer Marjolijn van Heemstra, has discovered the importance of experiencing the nighttime, and, to share this experience with others, organizes night walks in the region around Amsterdam.<sup>46</sup> The increased focus on the night goes together with an increased focus on the winter. The English novelist and non-fiction writer Katharine May, for instance, has published a book in 2020 about the importance of experiencing the wintertime, which has helped her to deal effectively with depression.<sup>47</sup> The importance of experiencing the wintertime is also seen in the growing popularity of going for a swim outdoors – in a river, a lake or in the sea – during the colder periods of the year.

So besides being confronted more with the reality of death and accepting its presence, we are collectively opening our hearts and mind more and more to the process of aging, to the nighttime and the wintertime. It is not a coincidence, I think, that these developments are happening simultaneously in our time.

## *6 Descending the ladder*

Acceptance of death as an integral part of life, means that we have to descend the ladder and leave our elevated, separated position behind us. This means a necessary correction of the ascent we have once made, collectively when the ego increasingly came to dominate our civilization a few thousand years ago, and individually when the ego developed in our

personal life. The historic ascent from a culture of partnership to a culture of domination, and the present descent to a new culture of partnership, has been researched and described well by Riane Eisler, starting with her groundbreaking book *The Chalice and the Blade*, followed by many other books devoted to the creation of a new culture of partnership.<sup>48</sup> As she has observed very well, the current period is a period of descending the ladder, which simultaneously takes place on an individual and collective level.

On the collective level, descending down the ladder means leaving the false security of the ivory towers at the top of hierarchical organizations behind us; that we are returning to an honest and open *face-to-face* meeting with our fellow human beings; that we are rediscovering that all our fellow human beings must be treated in a truly egalitarian way, without the hindrance of titles, positions and levels of income. It also means returning to an equally honest and open *face-to-place* meeting with the more-than-human world around us.

Talking about face-to-face and face-to-place meetings already shows that we cannot really separate the collective descent from the descent on an individual level. Nevertheless, about the individual descent a few more specific things can be said. The individual descent reverses a process of ascent: it represents a return to the very beginning of our life, a rebirth. In our embryonic development the heart starts beating first. Our brain develops only at a later stage, and after we are born there is a gradual shift to the brain due to the development of the ego. This is an important, unavoidable process, but it clearly shows where the centre of our being is located: in the *heart*. And the embryo itself is growing in the mother's womb, which is also the location of the *hara* centre. In our sense of separation, we have started to assume that the centre of our being resides in the brain and we have forgotten that the true centre of our being does not reside in our head but in our heart, and probably even more so in the *hara* centre just below it.

Research has shown that the electro-magnetic field from the heart is much more powerful than from the head – about 100 times as powerful –, and that in its balanced state it forms a torus which resonates directly with the torus of planet earth.<sup>49</sup> Between both an ongoing reciprocal process of exchange is happening, completely beyond our conscious control. Healing ourselves resonates on a planetary level with the whole earth and the

electro-magnetic field of the earth resonates with us on an individual level through the heart. So the healing process of our sense of separation takes place at this level, and not ‘higher up’ in our head.

Indigenous people have already been aware of this, as – for instance – the view of the Native American Chief Mountain Lake (of the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico) has clearly shown. He explained to the visiting Swiss psychologist Carl Jung in 1932, that they thought with their heart and not with their head. The following anecdote is reported in his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: ‘Chief Mountain Lake: ‘See how cruel the whites look, their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression; they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something. They are uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think that they are all mad.’ When Jung asked why he thinks they are all mad, Mountain Lake replied, ‘They say they think with their heads.’’ Jung then asked him what he thinks with: ‘‘We think here’, said Mountain Lake, indicating his heart.’<sup>50</sup> It is not a coincidence that the Native Americans generally felt deeply connected to the web of life of Mother Earth: they did, because they were thinking with their heart. The torus of their heart was resonating with the torus of the earth.

When we are born, we face the world from our heart, and with an open mind, full of wonder. We face the world with our sensitive soul. Of course, we are born as very vulnerable beings and need the protection provided by our parents, primarily our mothers. This open-minded state is very important and needs to be cherished. Broken hearts – with the accompanied shift to the head, to the fight-or-flight response of the left hemisphere – can always be mended. By descending to the heart, we have opened ourselves again to our growth process, and to our own sensitive soul. Therefore, this descent is also a movement from a focus on the world from without, to a focus on the world from within, from the position of our soul. With this, we leave the position of experiencing life *outside-in* behind us, and return to the position of experiencing life *inside-out*. And the torus of the powerful electro-magnetic field of the heart aligns itself again with the much larger and more powerful torus of the electro-magnetic field of Mother Earth, and

through this alignment we are open to receive its healing power. On the heart level, our own soul aligns again with the soul of the Earth, the Anima Mundi.

### *7 The presence of Paradise and Heaven – on Earth*

Creating the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible, is another way of saying that we can create Heaven on Earth, or the Earthly Paradise. I don't consider myself a Christian, but I cannot deny that in this regard some valuable messages accredited to Jesus have been passed on to us. Two of them in particular have been coming back to me on a regular basis, because they sound so simple but in fact are very hard to turn into an experienced reality. The first one is 'But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you.'<sup>51</sup> The second one is 'The Kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth, and the people do not see it.'<sup>52</sup> For me, these two insights point in the same direction.

Let me start with the first one. Loving your enemies in the outer world can only be realized when you have fully dealt with the enemy within; when you have integrated the Shadow, in Jungian terms; in the terminology of this article, when you have managed to leave your dualistic mindset behind you. In this dualistic mindset, the enemies without are triggering the inner process of projection; and in that sense, they can be revalued as important teachers, who invite you to deal with the shadow of the enemy within. This process, their confrontation can become a gift to be cherished. That kind of transformation is, or course, one of the hardest things to realize. Of course, you will not be perfect and will continue to fail every now and then. This happens to me as well. But as long as we keep answering our outer enemies with projected hatred and fighting and a lot of our energy is spent in dualistic struggles, we will not be ready yet to understand the depth and meaning of the second insight.

The language of the second insight, about the Kingdom of the Father that is already spread around us, from the Gospel of Thomas, reflects of course the patriarchal culture in which Jesus lived his life. Azra and Seren Bertrand think 'the Queendom of the Mother'... 'more accurately reflects the original meaning of the phrase'. In their view the correct translation of

the saying should be ‘The Queendom of the Mother is spread upon the earth, and the people do not see it.’<sup>53</sup> In this way, in the insight the pre-Christian Goddess heritage is reflected, in which Sacred quality that is present in the landscape, in the more-than-human world, was cherished – before it was demonized by the rise of patriarchal culture. Jesus was reminding the people of the fact that Paradise is not a place that only existed in the distant past and that Heaven is not a realm that is only waiting for us in the future, but that glimpses of it are available to us now, at this very moment. Its presence can be experienced by a radical change of our consciousness, a revival and renewal of a state of consciousness that we have separated ourselves from.

This is actually in line with a saying by Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John: ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God, unless they are born again.’<sup>54</sup> Probably also Jesus’ saying about the relationship between children and the Kingdom of Heaven, can be understood in this context: ‘I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’<sup>55</sup> In other words, to open our minds to the Kingdom (or to Queendom), and get access to it, we have to get reborn; we have to renew our contact with the growing tiny fetus we have once been, and realize to what extent the surrounding womb or matrix and the invisible soul or morphic field has always been helping us to grow. By going back to the Source, becoming aware of the unifying Tao that is present beyond everything, we can realize that Paradise is already present here and now, and represents in fact nothing but the experience of Heaven of Earth.

Anyway, it is clear that by these statements Jesus was deviating from the Old Testament. In Genesis Paradise is presented as an ideal state in which we once lived our lives but has been lost forever, due to our own sinful behaviour symbolized by eating the Forbidden Fruit – due to committing the Original Sin which has caused the Fall to occur. In this view, we will never get access to Paradise again. We have to live with our fallen state, and make the best of it. Jesus, however, has given us the hopeful outlook that access is still open to us.

But unfortunately, we have been sticking to the Old Testament version throughout the history of the Western world. When people go searching

elsewhere for Paradise or the Kingdom of Heaven, and believe that the Promised Land is connected to a distant place, they have not yet realized that what Jesus meant when he said that the Kingdom is already present all around us, but that we do not see it. When Moses left Egypt to find the Promised Land, he identified it with a distant place. When European colonists crossed over to the New World to find the Promised Land over there, they were driven by a similar spirit. When American settlers crossed over from the east to the west on their Manifest Destiny, they were still involved with a search for the Promised Land. When the Jews were given the land of Israel and the Palestinians were driven out in 1948, the leaders in the Western countries responsible for this were still connecting a distant place with the Promised Land. It goes to show that in the Western world we have a long history of mistaking the map for the territory – a mistake that is far from easy to correct. Up to the present day, we often still do not realize that the Promised Land potentially exists in the land underneath our own feet, that walking through a forest does not automatically mean we have also walked into the forest, and that this can only be turned into a reality through a profound change of consciousness, through a process of awakening experiences.

It is interesting that the reinterpretation of Jesus' ideas about the Kingdom of Heaven that is offered by the rediscovered Gospel of Thomas, fits well with the reappraisal of the cultures of indigenous people from all over the world, which is increasingly manifesting itself since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They have shown that they have always kept feeling deeply connected to and embedded in the Sacred Landscape. And when we look to the European past, we know that our Celtic ancestors were aware of the fact that the division between the world in which they were living and the Otherworld was really thin. To them this Otherworld was not just an afterlife that they would enter when they died, but was present around them all the time, influencing and enriching their earthly life. They seemed to have known what Jesus knew about the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, we might be dealing here with a universal lost insight, that once might have been known among all our human ancestors.

But has it really been lost forever? The presence of Paradise or the Kingdom of Heaven is still closer to us than many people might realize. In

this regard, I think of the people who have gone through near-death experiences, mentioned earlier, and also about the astronauts whose worldview has often been transformed by their experiences in outer space. Their reports give important messages to humankind. Although they usually do not want to be compared to prophets like Jesus, through their messages they are actually telling something similar: that our life on planet earth is much more wonderful than we often realize; that the Earthly Paradise or Heaven on Earth is still present around us, and that we only have to open our senses to be able to see it. Anita Moorjani and Eben Alexander, the writers whose books about their near-death experience I have mentioned earlier, have not just written about the experience itself, but also about how it has profoundly changed their ideas about who we are as human beings, about the kind of world we are living in – and what we can do to improve the quality of our lives. Moorjani has written about experiencing Heaven on Earth, and about the importance of the power of empathy and of the empathes who embody this power very strongly. Alexander has written about the creation of a mindful universe. Both give workshops, retreats and talks to explain their changed worldview, and to initiate or support such a transformation process in others.<sup>56</sup> With regard to the transformed worldview as a result of an outer space experience, the astronaut Edgar Mitchell has written a very interesting book. His vision reflects the experience of a lot of other astronauts. The core of these experiences was the fact that as astronauts they were sent into outer space to explore this outer space, but that their attention was drawn back in an irresistible way to Mother Earth, as if they were seeing Her for the first time. And they deeply realized that we cannot live outside Her matrix. That we fully depend on Her and therefore should treasure Her.<sup>57</sup> It is very interesting, I think, that the changed worldview of the people who have had near-death experiences and the outer space experience of the astronauts, which seem to belong to very different fields, actually have an awful lot in common. Both have come to realize what a wonderful place our own planet is, truly a Mother Earth, a large organism that is Sacred and therefore deserves the name of the ancient Greek Goddess Gaia. In their view, She is a large living being who in Her powerful and mysterious womb takes care of a gigantic diversity of smaller living beings, lets them get born and continue to grow during their lives –

by providing them an abundance of gifts to make this all possible. Both the people who have had near-death experiences and the astronauts have become aware that we all belong to the Earth and that the Earth does not belong to us. In short, for them the Earth has become a place in which they have started to feel completely *at home in*.

But fortunately, you do not need to have gone through a near-death experience and you do not have to have been an astronaut who had the privilege of making a trip into outer space, to come into contact with the Earthly Paradise or Heaven on Earth. In this respect, there are several simple and easy ways available to generate the transformation of our consciousness. In recent decades we all have become more aware of opening our heart and mind, bringing more rest and balance into our lives by trying to improve our sleep, by practicing meditation, or by being kinder and more helpful to other people. But besides giving more attention to our inner world and the human world, I think it is time to also give more attention to the outer more-than-human world. We can go for walks, familiarize ourselves with the landscape that surrounds us, get in touch with the subtle changes of perspective, of light, and so on. The American naturalist and environmental philosopher John Muir has already observed something interesting and valuable about walking more than a hundred years ago: 'I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out until sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in'.<sup>58</sup> When you experience that going outdoors really means entering into another world – when you manage to humble yourself, to let yourself completely become part of the reality of the outer world, allow yourself be embraced by the Earth Mother and put your trust in Her – you have found the (lost) entry into the Earthly Paradise or Heaven of Earth. Then the outer world has become part of your inner world – a place to feel completely at home in.

In this context I often have to think about the story that the Irish 'modern mystic' and philosopher John Moriarty has told about a walk he made with a Dutch professor through an Irish wood. He reported about one particular walk that during this walk his companion was filling his notebook with names of specific plants that he came across. When they finally emerged from the wood, Moriarty concluded that his Dutch companion 'had walked through the wood but he at no point walked into it. Having an



educated eye, he met with his own knowledge but he didn't meet the wood.' Despite the fact that this Dutchman considered himself a Buddhist for ecological and spiritual reasons, according to Moriarty, 'his marvelously open modern mind' was still 'denying him entry.'<sup>59</sup> In other words, he had not discovered yet, like John Muir had done, that going out was really going in.

Perhaps not everyone is aware of the fact that the paradisiacal experience, as a result of awakening experiences, has always remained open and accessible for anyone. Simply open yourself to this experience, for instance, by going for long walks, preferably in a natural environment; open your mind, and at a deeper level your heart, to the power of the surrounding landscape – and feel how you are still fully embedded in it, an inextricable part of it, feel naturally humble among its enormous presence and how you even enjoy your dependence on it. You need not even necessarily leave the city for this kind of experience: a park nearby might sometimes be enough. The oxygen given to us freely by the trees, plants and plankton and keeping us alive, is even present on the 50<sup>th</sup> floor of a skyscraper, or deep in a tunnel or in a cave: virtually everywhere on the planet the beneficial power of the natural world is present.

But it is true, of course, that the presence of trees and earth all around us, of the ocean, of beautiful hills, mountains, rivers or of overwhelming views over an uninhabited landscape: all these natural features help to make the paradisiacal experience more accessible and to intensify it further. When you walk during the day, experience the subtle changes of perspective as you move along, the ongoing changes in the weather, the wind, the light, the sounds, the smells and the colours. Experience the changes in your inner landscape – and how your processes of breathing, seeing, feeling, hearing and smelling cross the boundaries between the outer and inner landscape. And when you walk long enough, experience the wonderful darkening process of the twilight. Not one moment is ever the same. The famous saying of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus 'you cannot step in the same river twice' is no longer a mere interesting insight, but is becoming an experienced reality. In this respect, I think that the wonderful experiences that occur between lovers, however important and overwhelming they can be for someone, are secondary to it.

The American researchers Mary Clare and Gary Ferguson have pointed out, in their book *Full Ecology*, that, due to the fact that everything in the natural world is interconnected with each other, spending time in it, will directly revive the side of our being that feels deeply connected to the surrounding world. This side of us resonates with nature. Our *ecological intelligence* is awakened, which they describe as follows: ‘the intelligence of stewardship, the intelligence that shows up to guide how you sustain and care for your relationships with all things, animate and inanimate, human and otherwise – *all things*.’ They add to this that ‘you are in your highest expression of when your thoughts and actions are in sync with the web of life pulsing in and around you.’ Clare and Ferguson show in their book that the natural world does not only awaken our ecological intelligence, but it simultaneously diminishes the other side of our being, the side that feels separated from the surrounding world.<sup>60</sup> Therefore going outdoors for walks in nature, especially when we turn them into a regular habit, will in itself already contribute to restoring the balance in our dual nature. It is even beneficial for our relationships with other people.

### 8 *Experiencing awe*

Feeling embedded in the surrounding more-than-human world manifests itself through experiences of awe. Experiencing awe means we are beyond thoughts and judgment, completely speechless and open to receive the fullness of life as it is. Majestic landscapes take us by surprise, overwhelm us by their incredible beauty. They make us simultaneously humble and small, and very large and powerful, as if for a while the boundaries between us and the environment have dissolved completely. The American psychologist Dacher Keltner, who I have mentioned before in this article, has done some interesting research into experiences of awe, and he found that they awaken a sense of gratitude and also altruistic feelings in us. According to him, they are significant for our mental and spiritual health and balance.<sup>61</sup> The English journalist Lucy Jones, who has written about the importance of the natural world in our healing processes (in her book *Losing Eden*), also refers to Keltner’s research into the transformative power of awe experiences: ‘Awe (...) can shift us away from pure self-interest to be interested in others. It can help us bond and relate to each

other. It can turn off the self, the day-to-day concerns, propel us into focusing on something bigger and hard to comprehend. (...) Really, awe is Earth's signature. We may have forgotten, but how could it not be?'<sup>62</sup>

It is important to know that we do not always have to travel to majestic landscapes to experience awe. We can experience it on a much smaller scale as well, near our home – by paying attention to a tiny flower or insect in the sitting room or in the garden, a tiny weed breaking through the pavement – realizing that all these fragile life forms imply the existence of the matrix of Mother Earth, and even the immeasurable universe around our planet. All plants and animals, from tiny to large, would not be there without the presence of the power of gravity, of sunlight, the regular rain, the cycles of the seasons, and the larger cosmic cycles. Also, the clouds in the sky above us imply the entire context in which they float through the air – sometimes very high, sometimes quite low, sometimes single, sometimes merging with other clouds, always in the process of changing their shape.

With regards to opening your mind to small ordinary plants in nature and looking at them with fresh eyes, in the documentary *De natuurlijke mens* the Dutch philosopher Matthijs Schouten read the following Haiku by the Japanese poet Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) during an open-air class:

When you look carefully  
a shepherd's purse is blooming,  
under the fence.<sup>63</sup>

Schouten explained that the Japanese sign for the first sentence is hard to translate, as it wants to express the act of looking from the point of view of the shepherd's purse. In his view, the Haiku puts our attention on a tiny, apparently insignificant plant that we have often taken for granted; it makes us look at it without any preconceptions, with complete openness and attention. Then he asked the students to go somewhere into the natural environment and practice this kind of experience for a quarter of an hour. Afterwards, when the students had gathered again, they all reported individually their experience. It showed that giving attention to tiny living beings and imaging life from their point of view, was a very good way to open the human mind to the mystery of life, and to generate experiences of

awe. Later in the same documentary we can see that Schouten impersonated *water* in a speech he gave to students at the Technical University of Eindhoven. In fact, water was giving the speech through his voice, and told the students how indifferent they had been to him and how badly they had treated him by polluting him with all their rubbish. It was a wonderful illustration of the fact that by giving water a human voice, we can become much more aware of our own wasteful, unecological behaviour. In this respect, Schouten was quite positive about the future. He said that in the last few decades the way that people are looking at nature has been changing a lot, and is still changing – in his view, for the better. He considered this a very hopeful sign.

### *9 The power to give, to share and to serve*

As indicated above, awe experiences generate altruistic feelings in us and awaken a sense of gratitude in us. In other words, they turn us into better, kinder, more cooperative people. Feeling ourselves fully embedded in the surrounding natural world, is accompanied by experiencing our own living body – and everything else that comes to us in the form of food, attention, help, friendship and love to keep the growth process going – as precious gifts. This generates a strong feeling of putting our power and well-being at the service of other people – and in a wider sense, to care for the more-than-human world. In this state of our heart and our mind, we know that gifts can only remain gifts when they keep flowing. So, we feel powered to pay back by giving service to whoever needs it, giving our attention, sharing our ideas, giving time, help, support and love to other people and the larger world. And when we keep practicing this, we will gradually begin to feel more and more connected with each other and with the world around us.

Here lies our hope for the future – the way to create the more beautiful world we all know is possible.

Leiden, January 2022

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Brendan O'Donoghue (ed.), *A Moriarty Reader. Preparing for Early Spring*, The Lilliput Press, 2013, p. 361. Originally from: *What the Curlew Said: Nostos Continued*, Lilliput Press, 2007.
- <sup>2</sup> Dr. Irving Oyle, *The New American Medicine Show*, Unity Press, 1979, p. 64-65.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Eisenstein, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*, North Atlantic Books, 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid. A Factor of Evolution*, New York University Press, 1972 (originally 1902).
- <sup>5</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, Vintage Books, 1997.
- <sup>6</sup> J. van Baal, *Man's Quest for Partnership*, Van Gorcum, 1981.
- <sup>7</sup> Iain McGilchrist has written interestingly about the distinction between the left and right hemisphere: Iain McGilchrist, *The MASTER and his EMISSARY. The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, 2010.
- <sup>8</sup> Charles Eisenstein, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*, North Atlantic Books, 2013.
- <sup>9</sup> Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child. Rediscovering Nature's Plan for our Children*, Bantam Books, 1980, p. 18, and further.
- <sup>10</sup> I came across this interesting concept of Robert Kegan in: Mary M. Clare and Gary Ferguson, *Full Ecology. Repairing Our Relationship with the Natural World*, Heyday 2021, p. 74-75.
- <sup>11</sup> Bruce Lipton, *The Biology of Belief. Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles*, Mountain of Love/Elite Books, 2005.
- <sup>12</sup> Taylor, Steve, *The Fall. The Insanity of The Ego in Human History and The Dawning of A New Era*, O Books, 2005.
- <sup>13</sup> I have written more extensively about the Patriarchal Shift in my forthcoming book *The Whole Story. Healing our Sense of Separation*.
- <sup>14</sup> You can find the song 'Death is Not the End', on Bob Dylan's album 'Down in the Groove', from 1988. It can be listened to on YouTube, and has been performed and recorded by many other artists, like Gavin Friday, Nick Cave and the Waterboys.
- <sup>15</sup> Gary Ferguson, *Master Lessons of Nature. What nature teaches us about living well in the world*, Doubleday, 2019, p. 76.
- <sup>16</sup> Lance M. Foster, 'The Invisible Ecosystem: a Native American Perspective', in: Jack Hunter (ed.), *Greening the Paranormal. Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience*, August Press, 2019, p. 89-97.
- <sup>17</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home. And Other Unexplained Powers of Animals*, Hutchinson, 1999.
- <sup>18</sup> Ross Heaven & Simon Buxton, *Darkness Visible. Awakening Spiritual Light through the Power of Darkness Meditation*, Destiny Books, 2005. I used the Dutch translation: *Duisternis belicht. Spiritueel ontwaken in de duisternis via Meditatie*, Ankh Hermes, 2007, p. 59-60.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert Wolff, *Original Wisdom. Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing*, Inner Traditions, 2001; I used the Dutch translation: *Oude Wijsheid van Natuurvolken*, Ankh Hermes, 2003, p. 113.
- <sup>20</sup> Laurens van der Post, *A Walk with a White Bushman*, Penguin, London 1988.

- <sup>21</sup> Laurens van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, Penguin, 1958. I found this story also in: David R. Hamilton, *Why Woo-Woo Works. The Surprising Science Behind Meditation, Reiki, Crystals, and Other Alternative Practices*, Hay House, 2021, p. 199.
- <sup>22</sup> Victória Duda, 'Ancients Webs, Modern Webs, World Wide Webs', in: Jack Hunter (ed.), *Greening the Paranormal. Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience*, August Press, 2019, p. 139-149.
- <sup>23</sup> See for instance: W. Y. Evan-Wentz, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*, Colin Smythe, 1988 (originally Oxford University Press 1911).
- <sup>24</sup> Joseph Campbell (with Bill Moyers), *The Power of Myth*, Anchor, 1991.
- <sup>25</sup> Joan Halifax, *The Fruitful Darkness. A Journey Through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom*, Grove Press, 1993, p. 104.
- <sup>26</sup> Joan Halifax, *The Fruitful Darkness. A Journey Through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom*, Grove Press, 1993, p. 107-108.
- <sup>27</sup> Joan Halifax, *The Fruitful Darkness. A Journey Through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom*, Grove Press, 1993, p. 154.
- <sup>28</sup> See for instance: Richard Heinberg, *Memories and Visions of Paradise. Exploring the Universal Myth of a Lost Golden Age*, Quest Books, 1995; Geoffrey Ashe, *Dawn behind the Dawn. Searching for the Earthly Paradise*, Henry Holt and Company, 1992; Anita Moorjani, *What if This is Heaven? How I Released My Limiting Beliefs and Really Started Living*, Hay House, 2016.
- <sup>29</sup> Laurens van der Post, *A Walk with a White Bushman*, Penguin Books, 1988, p. 30-31. Van der Post still spoke about humankind in the he-form, but I assume that he actually referred to both man and woman.
- <sup>30</sup> I know that 'doors' have been a relatively recent invention, but in my view the terms *outdoor* and *indoor* make very clear to what kind of different realities they refer.
- <sup>31</sup> Peter Nabokov, *Where the Lightning Strikes. The Lives of American Indian Sacred Places*, Viking Penquin, New York 2006, p. 108.
- <sup>32</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift – the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Routledge, 1990 (originally. 1923/24); Lewis Hyde, *The Gift. Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, Vintage, 1999 (originally 1983); Aafke Komter (ed.), *The Gift. An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Amsterdam University Press, 1996; Jacques Godbout (in collaboration with Alain Caillé), *The World of the Gift*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998; Genevieve Vaughan, *Homo Donans*, Anomaly Press, 2006; Charles Eisenstein, *Sacred Economics. Money, Gift, and Society in the Age of Transition*, Evolver Editions, 2011; Before Mauss made Western people aware on a large scale of the importance of gift giving, other researchers had already been writing about this phenomenon – for instance, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronislaw Malinowski and Peter Kropotkin. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Rousseau opened the door to the gift by acknowledging compassion as a basic human quality: Ton Lemaire, *Het Vertoog over de Ongelijkheid van Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Een inleiding in de cultuurfilosofie*, Ambo boeken, Baarn 1976, p.63-64; Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid. A factor of Evolution*, New York University Press, 1972 (originally 1902).
- <sup>33</sup> Scilla Elworthy, *Power & Sex. A Book about Women*, Chrysalis Books, 2003; see also my blog *Male privilege and the abuse of power*: <https://leidenlawblog.nl/articles/male-privilege-and-the-abuse-of-power>.
- <sup>34</sup> Brown, Brené, *Daring Greatly. How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*, Penguin Life, 2015.
- <sup>35</sup> Arthur Koestler, *De menselijke tweespalt*, Van Gorcum, 1981; David Lorimer, *Whole in One. The Near-death Experience and the Ethic of Interconnectedness*, Arkana, 1990.

- <sup>36</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home. And Other Unexplained Powers of Animals*, Hutchinson, 1999; Rupert Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared at. And Other Aspects of the Extended Mind*, Harmony, 2003.
- <sup>37</sup> The strong reaction by these two science-philosophers, Herman de Regt and Hans Dooremalen, on Pim van Lommel and his research you can find here: <https://www.trouw.nl/opinie/het-bewustzijn-leeft-helemaal-niet-voort-na-de-dood~bb25c6207/>; More than a decade earlier, in 2008, they have written a book in which they devoted an entire chapter to discrediting Van Lommel's research: Herman de Regt & Hans Dooremalen, *Wat een onzin! Wetenschap en het paranormale*, Boom, 2008. In the mean time, apparently their materialist view of science has not altered.
- <sup>38</sup> Dacher Keltner, *The Power Paradox. How We Gain and Lose Influence*, Penguin, 2015.
- <sup>39</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Occidental Mythology. The Masks of God*, Penguin, 1991.
- <sup>40</sup> Anne Baring & Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess. Evolution of an Image*, Penguin, 1991, p. 171.
- <sup>41</sup> Steve Taylor, *Waking from Sleep. Why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent*, Hay House, 2010; Steve Taylor, *Out of the Darkness. From Turmoil to Transformation*, Hay House, 2011; Steve Taylor, *The Leap. The psychology of spiritual awakening*, Hay House, 2017; Steve Taylor, *Extraordinary Awakenings. When Trauma Leads to Transformation*, New World Library, 2021.
- <sup>42</sup> Albert Schweitzer is quoted in: Dr. Irving Oyle, *The New American Medicine Show*, Unity Press, 1979, p. 54.
- <sup>43</sup> See for instance: Anita Moorjani, *Dying to be me. My Journey from Cancer, to Near Death, to True Healing*, Hay House, 2014; Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven. A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, Simon & Schuster, 2013.
- <sup>44</sup> Steve Taylor, *Extraordinary Awakenings. When Trauma Leads to Transformation*, New World Library, 2021.
- <sup>45</sup> Clark Strand, *Waking up to the Dark. Ancient Wisdom for a Sleepless Age*, Spiegel & Grau/Random House, 2015. I have read the Dutch translation of his book: *Wakker zijn in de nacht. De spiritualiteit van slapeloosheid*, Ankh Hermes, 2019.
- <sup>46</sup> Marjolijn van Heemstra, 'Waarom ik de nacht zo mis (en nodig heb)', *Trouw*, 23 oktober 2021, *Tijdgeest*, p. 6-9. This article can be read online, under the title 'Aardedonkere nacht, waar ben je gebleven?' See also her website: [www.marjoleijnvanheemstra.nl](http://www.marjoleijnvanheemstra.nl).
- <sup>47</sup> Katharine May, *Wintering*, Penguin, 2020.
- <sup>48</sup> Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade. Our History, Our Future*, Pandora, 1990; Riane Eisler, *The Power of Partnership. Seven Relationships That Will Change Your Life*, New World Library, Novato, 2002. Riane Eisler, *Tomorrow's Children, A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Westview, 2000.
- <sup>49</sup> Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Biology of Transcendence. A Blueprint of the Human Spirit*, Park Street Press, 2004; Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Heart-Mind Matrix. How the Heart Can Teach the Mind New Ways to Think*, Inner Traditions, 2012.
- <sup>50</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Random House 1989, (originally published in 1961).
- <sup>51</sup> The World English Bible, Matthew 5: 42-45.
- <sup>52</sup> The Gospel of Thomas, saying 113.
- <sup>53</sup> Azra Bertrand, M.D. & Seren Bertrand, *Womb Awakening. Initiatory Wisdom for the Creatrix of All Life*, Bear & Company, 2017, p. 19.
- <sup>54</sup> John 3:3
- <sup>55</sup> Matthew 18:3
- <sup>56</sup> Anita Moorjani, *What If This Is Heaven? How Our Cultural Myths Prevent Us From Experiencing Heaven On Earth*, Hay House, 2016; Anita Moorjani, *Sensitive is the New*

Strong. *The Power of Empaths in an Increasingly Harsh World*, Yellow Kite, 2021; Eben Alexander – with Karen Newell, *Living in a Mindful Universe. A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of Consciousness*, Rodale Books, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Edgar Mitchell, *The Way of the Explorer: An Apollo Astronaut's Journey Through the Material and Mystical Worlds*, G. Putnam & Sons, 1996.

<sup>58</sup> John Muir is quoted in: Joan Halifax, *The Fruitful Darkness. A Journey through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom*, Grove Press, 1993, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Brendan O'Donoghue (ed.), *A Moriarty Reader. Preparing for Early Spring*, The Lilliput Press, 2013, p. 382. Originally from: *What the Curlew Said: Nostos Continued*, Lilliput Press, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Mary M. Clare and Gary Ferguson, *Full Ecology. Repairing Our Relationship with the Natural World*, Heyday 2021, p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> Emma Stone, *The Emerging Science of Awe and Its Benefits. New research is exploring the vast potential awe holds for self and society*, Website Psychology Today, 2017: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/>.

<sup>62</sup> Lucy Jones, *Losing Eden. Why Our Minds Need the Wild*, Allen Lane, 2020, p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> *De natuurlijke mens*, documentary by The Boeddhistische Blik, 2021. In Dutch the Haiku is: wanneer je goed kijkt, bloeit er een herderstasje, vlak voor het hek.