

Occasional Note #12

The Experience of Kosmos

“Kosmos”

In the last years I have tried to find a way of speaking about this emerging experience of full awakening and incarnation and participation in the sacred living universe as a soul *and* as a very particular human being, and I have found that the term “kosmos” comes closest to capturing it. “Kosmos” is a word from Ancient Greek-- a very apt and beautiful word in that language, because it means both “immediate beauty”, and “beauty of the whole”. It is both microcosmic and macrocosmic. Further, it also means “deep order”--that there is a deep living order to the world, to the universe, that is not random. This is the way in which Pythagoras used the word in his teaching—to mean at the same time beauty and deep order. “Cosmetic” is derived from it, but this is a degradation of the term, for in its original meaning, it points to the deep beauty of all people and beings, and to the beauty of the earth and the Universe, not to superficial beauty. In this meaning beauty and deep order are one.

When we are deeply connected to Life as a soul—when we’ve awakened as a soul, when soul and personality are integrated in the way I’ve talked about in Holy Fire, when we are becoming incarnated as souls— we have an increasing experience of “kosmos”. We experience our own particular place, part, and being in the world and this brings us a sense of our own beauty and the deep order of our life. We also experience an immediate apperception of how incredibly beautiful, in both these senses of the word, the world is. And we experience the beauty and order of a Universe that is alive and sacred. This is not mechanical order, not arbitrary order, but organic, natural order. As we mature as souls, we increasingly have this apperception—almost as if this is how we as souls are seeing the world all the time-- and it changes our life forever. This is the experience of “kosmos”.

Conversely, in our more limited and identified consciousness, in

our wounds and reactions, we fragment that apperception. In our suffering and our inability to stay connected, we cannot sustain it, and it comes to us only in glimpses that are soon lost. In this respect, at the moment, for the most part, we are beauty blind as a species, largely disconnected from our souls, and starving spiritually, as I have described in Holy Fire. But as we proceed on the journey, and awaken, mature, and manifest who we truly are, we gain this capacity to experience kosmos and to sustain it in our lives. We increasingly and consistently perceive the beauty and deep order of the world and universe, experience ourselves as part of this, and consequently choose to celebrate and protect this Life rather than exploit and destroy it.

The new emerging earth spirituality leads to, and supports, this experience of kosmos, as does the soul process of each person, each in a unique way. Kosmos is the fruit of the process of soul awakening, incarnation, and realization/expression that I have been describing here. Further, this apperception of beauty seems to be coming to us through direct experience rather than in some set of ideas, or beliefs. It is not about dogma, or precept, but rather the result of letting life force, or Spirit, move in us, in our immediate experience, and learning how we can best contain and express this soul force in our daily lives.

Kosmos is *“the experience of being fully alive on a sacred planet in a living universe”*. It is a state of human consciousness that is at once both individual and universal. It is the microcosm and macrocosm experienced as one living system, infinitely differentiated, completely integrated and coherent, and at the same time an awareness of the soul process at work, and of the necessary incompleteness, imperfection, and suffering which are aspects of this realization. In this sense, it is very complex, and at the same time quite simple. Feyodor Dostoyevsky, in one of his novels has a character exclaim, “Beauty will save the earth” and it is this experience of kosmos that I believe he is speaking of.

As we, both individually and as a species, open to this apperception of beauty and deep order more and more, as we mature as human beings, we will see and savor this level of aliveness more and more and begin to live in relationship to it. In this light kosmos is the natural outcome of

the soul journey, of soul process, of soul awakening, incarnation, and realization/expression. And once we begin to see the world in this way, we can never go back to destroying it and each other as we are now. *Through the experience of kosmos the planet becomes sacred and the Universe alive, and we are, each and all, an inherent part of this Great Life.*

Identification as Limitation

Yet another way to say this--and I am choosing several in order to keep the experience alive—is that any identification limits this perception of full universality/particularity-- one's own, and others', and the world's. Identification is a lens that lets in some light, but screens out other. It is partial in its perception, and so limited. This is why, in time, we need to let them all go, in order to see more fully who we are and what world we truly live in. We need to be empty of these limitations in order to be full of Life. As identifications fall away, our perception opens to include more and more of what is really there, more and more particularity and difference, held within a universal spiritual context. And at moments of soul-identification and realization we are able to embrace all differences, all particularity, and perceive and receive ourselves, others, and the world as we/they truly are. Paradoxically, in our loss of identity and emptiness of identification, we come to experience the fullness and vitality of All Life of which we are a particular and precious part.

When we are blind to this vital beauty, when we are identified in ways that keep us from beholding Life in this way, we wound each other, and we experience separation and disconnection from ourselves, each other, and the world. As I said above, we are beauty-blind, and in our blindness strike out for ourselves against others. We suffer, and inflict suffering on others. This is the human condition, and it generates the world we live in--one that is familiar to us all. But as we mature spiritually, both as individuals and a species, as we touch this experience of kosmos more often and more vividly, this can change.

The obstacles to this experience are clear and many at all levels of organization. Any identification impedes this experience. There are our

personal identifications, but there are also cultural, national, and even species-wide identifications that limit our capacity for this apperception and the beholding of the full particularity and beauty of All Life.

Ironically, this beauty surrounds us always, but we fail to see it because of these limits in our consciousness. But thankfully, the very obstacles are also the means to this awakening, for they are also the very particularity that we perceive when we touch the Whole, so there is no loss in this experience of identification, but rather a shift in perspective that allows us to behold the world in its particular beauty from a place that is not limited by those same particulars.

Seamless Reality

Sometimes in spiritual and philosophical worldviews, there occurs a split between material and non-material reality, or between form and formlessness. Often too there arises from this an hierarchical differentiation where the spiritual, formless is “higher” than the material/formal levels, and therefore more pure and valuable. Religious teachings have definitely contributed to this split and Plato and Aristotle, each in their own way, have also- one with the perfect ideas beyond form, and the other with the objectification of matter by subjective observation.

With the experience of kosmos I am suggesting something different, and the Greek philosopher Pythagoras saw reality in a very kindred way. In the experience of kosmos there is no such split. Rather there is the paradoxical experience of Life force both holding and infusing all forms of reality **and** being at the same time embedded in them, so that there is one seamless living reality infinitely differentiated.

The Seamless Reality is in no way monolithic, but rather incredibly diverse, constantly changing and in process, and, at the same coherent and deeply orderly. And from it the experience of kosmos emerges. In this experience the world is divine, or sacred, and at the same time the Divine is totally in the world, not apart from it. The Universe and everything in it is alive and sacred, but at no loss to the incredible uniqueness of each being within this seamless reality. In fact, this perspective enables each being to be more itself while participating at the same time in the Divine whole of Life.

This means that there is nowhere to go in the sense that everything is right here. Of course, there is the soul process and change and transformation, and the details of this is what Holy Fire is about, but the context for these is this seamless reality of Life, which includes birth and death, and which is forever now. As we awaken as souls, and incarnate more and more fully, we begin to experience that All is literally One, but at no loss of infinite differentiation and differences of the forms of Life. It is a holy paradox that we learn to bear and embrace in our consciousness and in our living. It is a way of speaking about spiritual maturity and the fruitfulness of the long soul journey we take on earth as souls. It could be construed as a “Fourth Awakening” to a living Universe, but more immediately it is simply the realization of sacredness of all Life as an experience. And it is also simply an experience of the beauty of whatever is.

This experience cannot be induced, or taught, or generated, or whatever we might try to do to get it. It is an experience that comes to us as fruit of long labor. It is an experience that we have all touched at some point, and all secretly yearn for. And yet, to “get” there we can only pay attention to where we are, no matter where that is, because that presence to what is is the path to kosmos.

Body as Soul

This experience of kosmos is a visceral more than visual one. It comes through all the senses, not just one. It is the incarnated soul resonating with the Universe through the particulars of our human experience moment to moment. It's as if each of us, each being, were a cell in the body of the world, and when we are connected, when we experience being part, and participating in the whole of the Universe, then we are both ourselves and joined with all other cells in the organism through a resonance which is harmonious and vital. This resonance is felt in the body and the feelings and mind, so they "thrill" with the energy of kosmos and the full incarnation of the soul. The soul's force is fully present on earth at that moment.

These moments are sometimes referred to as "kingdom moments" and we all have experienced them. The challenge is to live and work in ways that these moments become more steady and sustained in our bodies and lives, moment to moment and over time and through space.

At these moments body and soul are one and our bodies participate in the Divine as the ground and expressor of soul force. No longer is the body split off, or left behind, in spiritual experience. Rather, it becomes the conductor of soul force, infused with beauty, and the instrument of soul expression in our daily lives.

Several human experiences resonate with this experience of kosmos.

Vitality

The first is vitality, or aliveness, or what I have been calling soul force. At these kosmic moments we feel very awake and alive, both in mind and body, and we experience soul force flowing through us. This is not a “high” feeling, based on transcending normal reality, but rather an aliveness that permeates all levels of our experience and quickens them. There is a poignancy and a sense of the preciousness of life, and our embeddedness in the flow of life force, both in us and in the Universe. Maslow describes this beautifully in his last journals as his “post-mortem” experience and it is an aliveness that is no longer afraid of death and so can be most fully alive.

Joy

The second is joy. Again, this is not a joy that arises from a certain condition, or success, or pleasure—in fact, it is often touched in the midst of great pain—but rather a joy that does not depend on condition, but rises from the experience of being alive on earth as a soul, fully incarnated, fully oneself. This joy is a resonance to kosmos and is stirred by the inherent beauty and deep order of life, so that it can be experienced anywhere and at any time, under any conditions. There are stories of this joy arising in the midst of war, or extreme suffering, and often at the moment of death. And there are stories of it arising in the presence of great beauty in Nature, or art, or in human company. It is an upwelling in our soul that both heals and vitalizes and brings us perspective and pleasure. It often sets things right, and it can become a sustained state of being that not only nourishes us, but also those around us who are touched by it.

Gratitude

A third is gratitude. In the experience of kosmos we realize how much we have been, and are, given by Life itself and the natural response to this realization is thanksgiving. A certain Zen monk was once referred to as “living in a state of perpetual thanksgiving” which means that his connection as a soul was so strong and steady that he was constantly aware of how much he had to be grateful for in being alive. Again, this is not so much gratitude for this particular thing or that particular friend, though these can be included in the experience, but more gratitude for everything, even the most painful moments in a life, and a profound sense that a great gift has been given again and again to us—the gift of life on this earth. It is quite the opposite from the experience of the personality that is rooted in the fear of death and not surviving on earth. Here there is no fear of death, but rather a wonder at how marvelous Life is and an experience of being held and nourished by it.

Blessing

Fourth is blessing. Again, this is not a high and heavenly experience as it is traditionally portrayed, but rather an everyday sense of good fortune and well being, which is quite grounded in the particulars of our life and savors them fully. This blessing is earthy and rises from being fully here on earth and no where else. All of us have moments of feeling blessed, but for most they are fleeting. Yet as we mature as souls, we can come to know it more fully and steadily within the context of our very daily life.

Kosmos, vitality, joy, gratitude, blessing. This is the state of consciousness of a soul fully realized and incarnated on earth. It is relatively rare still, and there is much to be done to bring it more into being, but I believe this is where we are headed, as ourselves, and as a species. And somewhere within we know this state already and so set out to seek our good fortune here and now on earth.

Divine Ordinariness

In all this, paradoxically, as we do the work required and learn to sustain a connection with our soul, to live as souls on earth, and to perceive this beauty and cherish it, life becomes more vital *and* more normal. It does not become a super-human life. Rather we have the experience of "divine ordinariness" and even self-forgetfulness, in the sense that, in our emptiness, we no longer need to pay so much attention to the intricacies of our psycho-spiritual development, but can simply be and do who we are in particular in the world. Personality and psyche become aligned with the soul and naturally express our spiritual force without resistance and reactivity. Our life simply takes care of itself as part of the Whole. We participate in All Life as ourselves, but experience no separation from It, even while at the same time we sense ourselves unique within it. We recognize our place and part in the larger Whole of planet and Universe, and are content to fulfill these with our given lives. In our ordinary lives, whatever they may be, heaven and earth become one. We experience the "rapture of being fully alive", as Joseph Campbell puts it, and the present moment itself, without going anywhere else, as divine and beautiful. We also realize that every moment on earth counts, and we live this realization in the present moment with ourselves, others, and in the world. We realize we are responsible and that we have the opportunity to respond in ways that will make things better for us and for all. And we truly enjoy life, whatever it brings, knowing that every experience is something to learn, and grow, from, as souls on earth.

Soul and Daily Life.

And yet it remains up to each of us how we take this soul journey and what its outcome is. We are free to choose, and though we resist as well as support ourselves, and though the world is not always amicable to this process, it is indeed ours, and is stored in our immediate experience. Whether we are spiritual or religious or not, no matter where we live, or to what race, or class, or culture we belong, we have this in us and are living it out, known or unknown, as best we can.

Each of us is needed; each of us has a place and part. Each of us is a cell in the body of the world, and so the health of the whole depends on ours. Each of us is growing and each has work to do. And, in these times of crisis and change, we have a particular opportunity to go further on our journeys and make a contribution to the planetary transformation underway. In this sense we are blessed to be alive on earth now, and the earth needs us to do our daily soul work. The fate of the earth is in our hands, and we have the capacity, if we so choose, to shape that fate to good and healthy ends.

Note: this Occasional Note is an adaption of chapter 7 of my book Holy Fire: The Process of Soul Awakening, published by Amazon in 2020.

Thomas Yeomans
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