



THE POWER OF
DIVINE EROS

The Illuminating Force of
Love in Everyday Life

A. H. Almaas & Karen Johnson

ABOUT THE BOOK

What do desire and passion have to do with our spiritual journey? According to A. H. Almaas and Karen Johnson, they are an essential part of it.

Conventional wisdom cautions that desire and passion are opposed to the spiritual path—that engaging in desire will take you more into the world, into egoic life. And for most people, that is exactly what happens. We naturally tend to experience wanting in a self-centered way. *The Power of Divine Eros* challenges the view that the divine and the erotic are separate. When we open to the energy, aliveness, spontaneity, and zest of erotic love, we will find it inseparable from the realm of the holy and sacred. When this is understood, desire and passion become a gateway to wholeness and to realizing our full potential.

The authors reveal how our relationships become opportunities on the spiritual journey to express ourselves authentically, to relate with openness, and to discover dynamic inner realms with another person. Through embodying the energy of eros, each of us can learn to be fully real and alive in all of our interactions.

A. H. ALMAAS is the pen name of Hameed Ali, the Kuwaiti-born originator of the Diamond Approach, who has been guiding individuals and groups in Colorado, California, and Europe since 1976. He is the author of *Spacecruiser Inquiry*, *The Pearl Beyond Price*, *Facets of Unity*, and other books.

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Dedicated to my dear husband, Gregory, whose love of earth and spirit has enriched the love and life
we share.

—KAREN JOHNSON



Dedicated to my wife, Marie, with love and gratitude for her steady love, love of the truth, delight in
life, and the support and space for me to pursue both my inner work and the work of birthing the
teaching.

—HAMEED ALI

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The book you are about to read will usher you into a mystical world hidden in the midst of your everyday life. Led by two intrepid spiritual explorers, this journey embarks from Amsterdam and arrives in the heart of the human soul. The particular quest is to discover the nature of divine eros—the source and the expression of the sublime animal and the sexy angel that lives within each of us. As it uncovers and addresses the age-old misunderstanding that our divine and our erotic natures are incompatible opposites, *The Power of Divine Eros* begins the process of delicious discovery of the reality that unites them.

A. H. Almaas (Hameed) and Karen Johnson have been colleagues and fellow travelers of the inner realms for more than thirty-five years. During this time, Hameed has articulated in more than a dozen books the spiritual path of inner realization called the Diamond Approach. This path has arisen mainly out of their joint exploration and is embodied in the Ridhwan School, a spiritual home for more than four thousand dedicated practitioners worldwide.

Since 2007, Hameed and Karen have taken their teaching on the road in the form of five-day workshops called Quasar Seminars, presenting the Diamond Approach work to new audiences in major cities in Europe and the United States. These public workshops provide the opportunity of direct engagement for seekers who cannot devote the time and energy to a more consistent participation in the Ridhwan School. Each year, Karen and Hameed choose a different city and a different topic that addresses the perennial hunger in the human soul for authentic depth and fundamental realness through personal experience.

The Quasar Seminar from 2008 gave birth to this book as a way to offer you, as a reader, the opportunity to discover some of the preciousness of what is possible for a human being living through the experience of divine eros. In the process of reading this volume, you will learn specific practices that support the continuing development of the soul. In addition, those of you who are already following a particular path with its own practices might discover support for these practices through this teaching, specifically through learning how to inquire into your own experience.

Two things set *The Power of Divine Eros* apart from other Diamond Approach books. The first is Hameed's collaboration with Karen Johnson. Karen's passionate and dynamic energy adds a new element to the presentation of this spiritual teaching. She speaks from the same source but with a different taste, a zesty flavor all her own. Their two voices are woven through the book and the teaching, bringing greater illumination and more sparkle to this juicy, evocative material. Hameed and Karen alternated teaching the segments, each of which has become a chapter in the volume, beginning with Hameed presenting the first one. In the session that appears in this book as the final chapter, the two both led the discussion that brings the seminar to a close.

The second new element is the fact that *The Power of Divine Eros* presents a more immersive experience of the actual teaching process than any other book by Almaas. Several of his previous books are also based on live teachings, and they include question-and-answer interchanges with participants as well as exploration sessions—exercises modified so that as you read, you can actively engage with the teaching.

In addition, this book includes more of the elements that comprise the full seminar process: The first chapter provides a detailed description of the Kath meditation practice used throughout the seminar. In subsequent chapters, different chant and sound practices are presented. Music meditation was done several times in conjunction with the teaching, and we have specified the music

selections used so that you can listen to these if you like and further enhance your experience. And finally, you will learn a special form of dyadic exploration that you can do if you choose to engage the practices in this book with a friend.

All of these different expressions of the teaching field will enhance the opportunity provided here to experience your own journey of divine eros in a way that is the closest thing—in book form—to being in the seminar room yourself.

Given our desire to pass on as much as possible the living experience of this Diamond Approach teaching, be aware that the resulting book is a hybrid animal: neither a straight transcript nor a book solely devoted to the reader. Because of this, there may be moments when you find yourself drawn into the meeting room in Amsterdam no matter where you are reading the book. The authors trust that you will appreciate being spoken to as the actual participants were in the seminar, while having enough modifications in the material to make it fully relevant for you as a reader.

BYRON BROWN

Edit

Acknowledgments

To all of our Divine Eros seminar participants, who brought such an adventurous spirit to the inquiry so that the seminar took off with great vigor—and only got deeper and more expanded from there—we are grateful. Your heartfelt interest in the truth of your experience opened and developed the field in such a way that we were all transported to new levels of consciousness through its intelligent momentum.

We would also like to acknowledge the skillful work and generous support of our staff, our assistants, and our sound crew, all of whom were instrumental in this event becoming a smooth unfolding transmission of the teaching. And thank you, Amsterdam, for opening your arms and providing the perfect holding for this event.

The thankfulness we feel in being able to provide this work to the public in book form would not be complete without a deep bow of respect to our editors, Byron Brown and Elianne Obadia. Their patience, clarity, intelligence, and kindness birthed the spoken word into the written and kept the original energy of teaching alive and sparkling. Their work was completed by the care and attention of Liz Shaw at Shambhala in shepherding the book through the publication process.

Last but not least, deep gratitude to the secret essence that bestows upon the world all gifts so effortlessly and generously, through its emissary, the diamond guidance, the particular guidance of this teaching, which enables the beauty, grace, and intelligent unfolding of this teaching so that the soul of humanity might taste its natural freedom.

IN OUR TIMES, the understanding of spirit and matter is undergoing yet another renaissance, and attempts are being made to bring together many of the variables in human life that keep us separate from ourselves, our nature, and from one another. In this book, we want to share with the reader a way that freedom manifests as a possibility for human beings that is rarely considered or spoken of—the realization that the erotic and the spiritual are not separate at all. That, in fact, they are two sides of the same reality.

The conventional view that the divine and the erotic are separate is necessarily challenged when one opens to the energy, aliveness, spontaneity, and zest of lusty love and finds it inseparable from the realm of the holy and sacred, the pure and innocent. For the ego, bringing these “opposites” together is understood to be disharmonious and paradoxical, at best. However, living a life that separates the fundamental truths of our experience from one another actually perpetuates the suffering that results from the truncated reality of ego existence.

The ideas in this book were originally presented over the course of a five-day seminar that took place in Amsterdam in May 2008, a seminar that we called Divine Eros. We hope that offering this teaching in published form can add to the currents of thought that are carrying us closer to the integration that is possible for every one of us to experience.

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

The perspective that the erotic and the spiritual can be wedded in a way that enhances our spiritual journey at the same time as it enriches our personal lives may not be immediately apparent. The erotic and the divine are most often not even seen as complementary in their quality or focus of interest. In fact, the usual human preoccupation with one often cancels the other out, so the possibility of a sacred marriage between the two is rarely contemplated, much less realized. In the course of the seminar, the recognition—and the actual experience—that this cancellation is not necessary was exciting and deeply fulfilling for many of the participants. In fact, the amazing energetic opening and joy during the seminar indicated that the teaching had landed, and inspired us to make it public. Such success showed us the human need for this view and the amazing potential for enhancing our lives when this view is realized.

What emerged for the participants in this seminar—and, we hope, for the readers of this book—was the recognition that the bringing together of our animalistic impulses with the angelic sacredness of our spiritual nature in our human experience can contribute to the journey toward wholeness. We can live fully as physical beings on Earth, inseparable from knowing ourselves as the exalted transcendent truth of spirit. The integration of these levels of existence will allow us to experience the dynamic living presence of our spiritual nature pouring into the world, taking on form and living through that form as who we are in our uniqueness—all the while never stopping being the totality of all.

In groups and seminars, the work that developed through us and that we have been teaching, known as the Diamond Approach, usually focuses on one specific pure aspect of our spiritual nature as it relates to personal life. We guide the participants toward the realization of that aspect as they work through their ego structures. However, in the Quasar Seminars—this Amsterdam seminar was one of them—which we have taught together in Europe and in the United States for the past several years, we have taken a different approach. Instead of focusing on spiritual aspects or dimensions, we chose themes that enabled us to explore topics of general interest in most people's lives that, at the same time, encompass many aspects and dimensions of our spiritual nature. What we discovered is that this approach spoke to individuals with varying levels of interest and spiritual experience; hence we imagine it will be applicable to a wider reading audience.

While the Quasar Seminars have focused on being relevant to everyday life and its challenges, the various themes that we have chosen also directly relate to the realization of transcendent spiritual dimensions of experience. We see these as two sides of the same coin, separated only by the conventional view of reality that excludes the unknown or invisible world.

As always in our work, we invited the participants to explore their individual experience as a doorway to understanding, making the work a very personal journey that kept each person connected to where he or she was moment to moment in opening to deeper spirit. One reflection of this process is in the question-and-answer periods during which we interact with individual participants; these are included in each of the chapters. And the topics we taught invited exploration of familiar but seldom discussed areas of personal experience, such as heartfully erotic love toward the inner beloved, how intimate friendship reflects the true beloved, and what it is that underlies real relationships the world over.

While reflecting this universality, the choice of themes for the various Quasar groups has also been related to the location in which the seminar took place; we have found that having discussions with individuals from the country or city where a seminar takes place is useful for pinpointing what is most relevant to a specific time and place. In Amsterdam, the lively interest in the connection between the erotic and the spiritual, the question of sexuality versus religion, led us to the theme of divine erotic. We felt that this theme would mesh well with the currents being expressed in the cultural discourse of the time in that city. Many of the people we know and met there are open and full of zesty sparkle, and we realized that their interests could be used to address a hot topic in the community as a means of awakening to reality. So we approached the work of spiritual realization in the group from this perspective. And conditions for our exploration were close to perfect.

CULTURE AND NATURE WORKING TOGETHER

The space where the seminar was conducted was called the Rode Hoed—Dutch meaning “red head.” At one time, it had been a hidden church, its existence kept secret because it was illegal to practice the Protestant religion. An interesting coincidence, perhaps, that a seminar concerning the hidden secret of the divine erotic was being held in a place that once held secret meetings of worship. From the outside, the Rode Hoed had the appearance of a lovely historic Amsterdam building. Opening the door, we saw the simple and clean entrance, a greeting room with a small snack bar on the right, ticket counters to the left, and a coatroom farther on.

The double doors at the end of the long entryway beckoned us toward them, and as we walked through these, a whole world seemed to open up. The historical legacy of the old church sanctuary seemed to hang lightly in the air but with no hint of repression. The spacious and elegant feel was, in fact, inviting—containing without any constraint. The dais, a large square area in the middle

surrounded by three floors of balconies, felt spacious and welcoming. The old wood, everywhere present, smelled aged and seasoned.

The room was perfect in its dimensionality, supportive and embracing for both the teaching and the energetic field that we created together. The structure of the hall provided a function for us that we had not anticipated: With three levels of balcony seating on three sides, it was like a 3-D teaching space. The most remarkable presence could be felt as soon as the hall started to fill with participants. And the experience of sitting on the dais felt like being surrounded by living angels.

The weather was also of the perfect order. On all five days, it was sunny, bright, and mild. The residents of Amsterdam tend to get even more joyous than usual when the spring weather is that good, so a particularly open and celebrative atmosphere in the city surrounded our meetings. Both local and out-of-town participants enjoyed the whole situation as they delved deeply into the exciting subject matter of the seminar. Culture and nature worked together to support the energy we were activating; the air was effervescent with delight, and nobody could keep a smile from spreading across their faces when stepping outside. The overall atmosphere made it easy to stay alert and focused on the journey—an adventure that began to unfold with an understanding that the work of spiritual realization always involves the element of love, a love that does not exclude the erotic.

THE DANCE OF MIND AND HEART

As we look into the nature of how love functions on the different paths to realization, we see that the more devotional types of spiritual practice, at some point the heart explicitly becomes an ecstatic expression of the union with God, or the Beloved. This ecstasy becomes erotic at times, as in the case of some Christian and Hindu mystics. The spiritual paths of mind and knowledge do not tend to bring in this type of erotic and juicy feel; knowledge and its precision open our experience to new realms, but the love is implicit more than explicit. Similarly, when love is present in a devotional and respectful form, it rarely expresses itself as erotic love.

In the way we usually work, we use the mind's discriminating capacity, the heart's loving nature, and the body's precious vehicle of life to go beyond all of these without leaving any of them behind. We do not emphasize one over the other, nor does deeper refinement through our work mean that we transcend these centers of our being; we simply see the natural potential hidden within them all. In the course of our spiritual maturation, each becomes more capable and more fully realized, not less.

Thus we use the mind to go beyond the mind's limitations; we use the capacity of discrimination to reveal subtler levels of mind. But here, the heart's innate love for beauty and truth is a guiding principle: The marriage of heart and mind is a must on this spiritual journey, for it is the segmentation of our experience that keeps them limited and restricted to conventional reality. The love of truth allows the mind to open to new possibilities that mental logic alone cannot reveal or consider entering. And the heart can be clarified of its historical and emotional content through the mind's clarity and precision, making available the energy liberated from the trapped structures of our personal history, so it can nurture and enliven our evolving spiritual development. This is the hidden tantra within the work of this path.

The term "tantra" refers to teachings that use energy for the sake of evolving spiritual being. Energy can be erotic, even sexual, but energy can also be emotional, mental, or simply energy itself. In the seminar, we made explicit the ways in which newly unblocked and released energies can liberate the spirit and reveal deeper mysteries of relationship and love—whether with God, true nature, or another human being.

The path of the Diamond Approach—sometimes referred to as Diamond Heart—is a love affair *par excellence*, where the mind and heart are bonded from the start, although this is not so apparent at the beginning of the journey. Both heart and mind are necessary for opening to truth—the deep desire to know the truth for its own sake and the love for the truth beyond all else. And as our practice of inquiry and meditation is refined over time, it becomes more obvious that the interdependence of mind and heart, and their integration through embodied experience, is vital for the revelation of our true being, for the wisdom of knowing and expressing its true nature. And with the wish to know and the desire to become one with that which we discover, the journey—the love affair—gathers momentum. We increasingly feel as though we were being taken over by a great brilliant force of energetic propulsion, with a direction and fortitude that we could not have imagined from our limited point of view at the start.

Our starting point for this seminar was the understanding that any spiritual work involves the element of love, whether explicitly or implicitly. What we wanted to explore during these days was how the energy and quality of love explicitly open the door to reality and to our deeper nature. The process of discovery in the group revealed that the portal is there for every human being to open; each of us can be fully real and alive in all our interactions. And the erotic, as it is felt and experienced in the body, is a part of that openness, whether it becomes sexual or not. For many reasons, eros has become separated from the pure and the holy, and as a result, it is usually relegated to the domain of the gross and unrefined. But eros is the energy of the divine. As such, it is always divine and pure.

One of the main tenets of the tantric approach as it is taught in our work is to feel whatever we are feeling in any given moment. It is not necessary to either act a feeling out or suppress it. We don't try to change either our feelings or ourselves; instead, we let the energy change us. Not acting out an emotion will eventually lead to the pure energy within it. And understanding the charge that we carry about the feeling will allow the energy to be cleansed of the fixed content of the charged emotion from the past, leaving it pure and clean, simply itself. This energy opens us to the realm of Being where we experience the essence of our being as flowing, dynamic, alive, intelligent presence. Frequently, the liberated energy opens up to a dimension of experience where the explosive and dazzling pulsing throes becomes foreground, manifesting as the fully alive energy of spirit and life. In this process, we see that the spiritual journey need not be a choice between the various parts of ourselves but, rather, through embracing the totality of our experience, the realization of a personal life of nonattachment without renunciation. Nothing has to be excluded. Then we can know ourselves as our unencumbered essence while enjoying a life of fulfillment.

By the end of the seminar, almost everyone was aglow with this recognition expressed in an erotically scintillating aliveness. There had been difficulties and delights, pain, and pleasure, all of which are the natural conditions of a soul's growing into being. But by the end of our time together, almost three hundred people became one delightful undulating ocean of excited clarity and blissfulness. We had grown to become one fluid body with many currents—each one a unique expression of the wonder of reality, simultaneously interconnected with the rest. Each person, with the distinctive unwinding of his or her consciousness, added a particular flavor and spice to the creative dynamic flowering that occurred in those days together.

The inspiration for writing this book has been many-faceted. First and foremost, our interest in offering this teaching emerged from the deep wish to share the fruits of the work that we have done on our own inner journeys. When one has tasted freedom, there is a natural movement to share with others who may benefit from the gifts of what that freedom has revealed. We hope that this book will provide for the reader an opportunity to taste something of what was experienced in Amsterdam. S

with deep love and gratitude, we offer this work to all beings for the sake of our evolution, as
species, toward becoming greater conduits for freedom to express itself in all of its astonishing
qualities and dimensions.

KAREN JOHNSON
Berkeley, California
July 31, 2013

Eros

HAMEED

IN OUR WORK in the Diamond Approach, we do many kinds of meditations and spiritual practices. One of the practices we emphasize is being present, because it is important in so many ways. Most people are lost in time—with memories of the past or plans for the future—and are lost in the mind. Being present means being in your experience in a different way than you normally are as you go about your life—that is, in a less distracted condition that enables you to hear better, receive better, feel yourself better, and be more aware of your experience. When we talk about being present, we mean being fully aware of yourself in this moment—you are here in the situation, in the experience, instead of being lost in time and completely taken over by your concerns. You are present in the moment; you are feeling the moment; you are aware of what is happening in the now.

The practice of presence develops over time so that you also become aware of what is present around you who is present. Who is the you that is present? What is the essence of your awareness? The practice of presence becomes an important and significant way of knowing our spiritual nature, of knowing and feeling the deeper dimensions of our Being.

One of the specific practices of presence that we recommend is to sense your body. The body has many centers, and the main ones we work with in the Diamond Approach are the belly center, the heart center, and the head center. The core of the primal energies that make up our life force is located in the lower body, and the belly center is the organizing hub for all of these energies. The belly has an energetic center, an energetic spiritual center. It is located in the center of the belly about three fingers below the navel and, depending on the size of your belly, anywhere from two to five fingers inside. The Japanese call it the *hara* center and the Chinese call it *t'an tien*. We call this point the Kath, a term taken from a Central Asian tradition. The belly center is also the grounding center: Your consciousness is like a tree, and the roots of the tree are in the belly. So we will be referring to the belly center as both the Kath and the belly center.

Because the belly center is related to the energies of the life force, we often have you sense your belly. As you become more aware of that area, and the belly center becomes more developed, more present, you become more in touch with the raw energies of your life force. Then you can better access what we call instinctual energy—the various energies of your survival, sexual, and social instincts.

During this seminar, we begin each of our meetings with the Kath meditation—a specific meditation on the belly center. Some sessions we will add a salutation, chant, or music meditation as a lead-in to the Kath practice. We use the Kath meditation because the belly center is the main one related to divine eros. It will help you connect to divine eros, so that you become both eros and divine eros. *[Readers are invited to do the Kath meditation (the belly meditation) on their own for twenty minutes daily and in conjunction with reading each chapter of The Power of Divine Eros. Exploring the Kath practice as well as other meditations and practices that are described in this book will help to unfold your own experience as you grow in the awareness of divine eros.—Ed.]*

The Kath meditation is usually done in a sitting position. Using a chair is fine, but any other means keeping your back straight is okay, too. The mudra (Sanskrit for “hand posture”) for this meditation looks like the Taoist yin/yang symbol, with the right hand holding the left hand, the fingers of one hand nesting in the other. This is called a mudra of containment, because it helps you contain your energy within so that it concentrates and can develop and strengthen.

For this meditation, it is best to have the eyes closed. Your mouth can be slightly open or closed and it is good to have your tongue touching the roof of your mouth, the upper palate.

Begin by paying attention to your breathing. Most people breathe in their chest, but in this meditation you will be breathing in the belly. As you breathe, feel your belly, sense it, as though you were touching it from the inside. With each breath, the belly expands, and as you exhale, the belly gets smaller again. You don’t have to take big or deep breaths; just be aware that there is breathing in the belly.

As you become aware of breathing in the belly, begin to concentrate your mind—which means concentrate your awareness, concentrate your attention—at the center of the belly. When you concentrate your attention at that center in the belly, you will not find anything in particular. This meditation is simply a concentration of your attention, of your awareness, of your mind, in that region. You might experience sensations of one kind or another; you might sense some localized presence; energy might build up; you might have various other experiences such as pulsation or heat. But the point is to hold a one-pointed focus on that area throughout the meditation without breaking it.

There will ordinarily be other kinds of inner activity and content as well—thoughts and images arising, external or inner sounds, and so on. Do not try to stop or block the content; do not try to do anything to your thoughts, emotions, memories, or sensations. It is fine that these things happen, but the point is to not let them distract you from your focus. The mental or emotional processes can occur without your taking attention away from the breathing in the belly.

If you fail in your initial attempts (as undoubtedly you will), it does not mean that anything is wrong. It is merely a sign that you haven’t done this meditation before or that you’ve been doing it only for a short time. If you get distracted, if you forget, if you become lost in thoughts or memories or planning—just bring your attention back to the center of the belly the moment you become aware that you’ve lost your focus. You don’t punish yourself. It is a practice, a skill you learn, so of course you don’t get it the first time. You are not used to focusing your mind in one place without your concentration being broken, so while you are still new at this, it will be broken over and over again.

Keep attempting to stay focused; every time your concentration breaks and you realize it, bring it back to the same place, remaining aware of the breathing in the belly and focusing at the center of the belly. Continue your meditation for twenty minutes, or more if desired.

We want to practice being present all the time as much as we can, not only during meditation periods. We can continue being aware of the center of the belly during normal everyday activities—for example, while riding a bicycle or cooking a meal. Continue feeling your breathing in the belly, though not necessarily the center of your belly. This is a practice of being present, one way of learning to be present in your experience. It can happen in your sleep as well. You might discover that you are dreaming and that you are aware of your belly in the dream.

ILLUMINATING THE DIVINE

In the Diamond Approach, our orientation is not toward having spiritual experiences. In fact, we are

not interested in having any particular type of experience at all. We are interested in actualizing our potential. This means realizing who we are, discovering what the essence of our Being is, continuing to recognize this, continuing being what we are—our spiritual presence, our true nature—and learning how to live as that. It is a profound, meaningful way of living.

So it is not a matter of having a succession of experiences while continuing to be the same person simply adding on more and more interesting spiritual experiences. No: At some point you learn who you are, what you truly are; and the one who lives your life becomes a different person. There could be other possibilities; you might not even feel like a human being at times, but regardless of the particular form that your being might take at one time or another, you want to be *you*, as fully and completely as possible. For a long time, you don't know who that one is. You say, "Me who?"

At a certain point, you realize that what you are is not different from recognizing the nature of your awareness, the nature of your consciousness. It is what you are. It is the essence of your Being. And the essence or nature of what we are can express itself in what we call spiritual qualities, or spiritual forms, or different kinds of subtle energies.

In this seminar, we are going to focus on a particular way that our nature can be experienced—specific subtle energy that we will call divine eros. Divine eros refers to a particular quality, a particular energy, a particular way of experiencing the nature of our consciousness. At the same time it is a way of experiencing, feeling, and knowing our consciousness that becomes significant for being open to the depth of our nature.

All of these modalities are useful in the realization of our nature, which means that understanding divine eros is very important for our enlightenment. We chose divine eros as our subject matter because it is a support for enlightenment; but our focus in this seminar, our orientation, is not only directed toward discovering the nature of consciousness and how to be present as that consciousness. More important, what we will learn and experience here is useful for living life—and it is particularly helpful in our relationships with other human beings. In other words, it brings our realization into the situations of our life.

We want to live as fully and as completely as possible. We are living life anyway, and we might as well live it well. To live it well means more than just eating well or exercising well. It means being completely and authentically ourselves, whether we are eating or riding our bicycle or interacting with another human being.

What we are going to be working with is actually a mysterious form of experience, a very subtle quality and also a secret one. It is something that most people do not experience and do not expect to experience. To most people's way of thinking, eros has to do with the animal or physical part of us. And the divine is certainly not seen as being harmonious with the animal part of our nature.

But we want to learn how to experience a particular kind of spiritual condition—the experience of a purely spiritual presence that is, at the same time, the very nature of eros. That presence, that condition, is completely pure, completely spiritual, in the sense that it has no ego, no self-centeredness, no conditioning. This is what we call divine. At the same time, we want to see how it is actually quite erotic.

We are going to be using the word "divine" in a way that may be a little different than some of you are imagining. The word "divine" is usually connected with God. But people use the word "God" to mean other things as well. For some, "God" means simply the purity and the exquisiteness of the spiritual nature. So instead of saying that something is godly, we will say that it is divine, to make a little distinction, a little difference.

When the word "divine" is used in this teaching, we mean pure egolessness. "Divine" is, in a profound sense, beyond this world; it comes from beyond the physical world as we ordinarily know it. It is not physical and it is not emotional. It is not mental. It's spiritual—but not otherworldly. It

spiritual and without ego.

When we use the word “divine,” we also mean something that is subtle. It is refined. We say that is pure, pure in the sense that it doesn’t contain other things in it. It doesn’t include our past and our beliefs or our ideas about it. It is our nature that is not touched or contaminated by, not mixed with our history, our associations, our culture, our preferences or ideas. It is completely pure as simple itself.

But whether you relate “divine” to God or simply to the purity of spiritual nature, we want to include in our usage of the word the purity of the spiritual universe, the egolessness, the selflessness, the utmost subtlety, the utmost transcendence, and the complete freedom from all conditioning. There can be a sense of beauty when we use the word “divine,” a sense of exquisiteness, a sense of gracefulness, a sense of magnificence, a sense of heartfulness, a sense of abiding in a deep and selfless type of love.

Something happens in the course of doing spiritual work that is very important on any path: The more we are connected with our spirituality, and the more we are aware of and in touch with our spiritual nature and the spiritual nature of reality and existence, the more our heart manifests what can be in its true nature. Our heart feels the purity of love, a love that is big, unrestricted, and not self-centered. It is a love that is completely generous, totally giving. That is why divine eros brings out selfless tenderness in us, an egoless sweetness, a generosity and appreciation that is not limited by anything. When I use the word “divine,” I am implying all of that.

THE PARADOX OF DIVINE EROS

We all have a way of experiencing love to one degree or another, at one level or another. We all know the experience of the love that is not “I love this so I am attached to it” but rather love in the sense of giving, of appreciating, of truly recognizing what we love, seeing it for what it is, and experiencing pleasurable appreciation of it. So when you really love somebody, you are happy to see that person not because it gives you something, but because you see who he or she is—and it is wonderful, it is beautiful, it is good. There is a sense of openness and unrestricted generosity—generosity of heart, generosity of spirit.

At the same time, for most people, this love is usually contrasted with—and in their experience appears to be opposed to—that which we call passion or passionate desire. One of the main polarities that controls or patterns our lives is the polarity between this open-hearted lovingness on the one hand, and, on the other, this wanting, this desire and need, to have something, possess something, grasp something, which makes love more self-oriented and self-centered.

Most spiritual teachings take the position that spirituality is more about pure lovingness and does not have much to do with desire, with wanting, with passion; desire, wanting, and passion are not seen as spiritual. The concern is that engaging in desire, wanting, and passion will take you more into the world, into the mundane, into the physical, and into egoic life. This position is taken because for most people, that is exactly what happens. It is difficult to think of wanting something without wanting for oneself. We naturally tend to experience wanting—especially strong desire, passionate wanting—in a way that is more focused on the self, that has a self-centeredness to it.

So we end up having two forces, two tendencies, two manifestations, in our consciousness and our experience: giving, open, generous love on one hand, and wanting, desire, passion on the other. And these frequently appear to be in opposition to one another. In fact, most people experience them as conflicting forces. For many individuals and in many spiritual teachings, spirituality means—and spiritual development requires—letting go of wanting, letting go of desire, letting go of the world and

embracing the spiritual. Only this, they think, will make them more loving, more compassionate, selfless, and ultimately free.

But most human beings have difficulty with that view because to them it means that they have become some kind of saint: “I’m not sure that becoming free that way is for me. Who wants to be a saint? They don’t have much of a life. They’re always generous, always giving, and do nothing for themselves. Not only don’t you have much of a life, there’s not even a thought of having an erotic life!”

We will be exploring how to be passionate and to feel a strong wanting *without* that desire being in conflict with the selfless kind of tenderness, with generous sweetness. We will come to see that there is such a thing as divine eros and that we can experience it. And we will discover how to be open to that possibility and access that dimension of reality.

ONE IN ETERNITY

You might be seeing why, for many of us, it is difficult to know this possibility because in our mind, in our consciousness, in our lives—and in most of history and philosophy—love and passionate desire have been considered two different, opposing tendencies or forces. We experience those two tendencies as being in opposition, in conflict—or, at best, in some kind of harmony or balance—but they are not usually experienced as one. They feel as though they are going in two different directions.

But a long, long time ago, these two forces were not separate. At a time we cannot remember, they were one. And the interesting thing is that they are still one—but they are one in eternity. What does this mean: “one in eternity”? It means that the two are one in the timelessness of our true nature, in the depth of our spiritual nature. The two are inseparable, primordially inseparable.

So we want to explore here what that actually means. We want to understand that not only can these two forces be harmonized so that they are no longer in conflict; they can be the same thing. They *are* the same thing—they are one force. And it is possible to have that kind of experience, that kind of recognition, because it is so: It is—they are—one.

If we look into the nature of that primordial oneness, we will be able to say that this is the case. “Primordial existence” means that something exists beyond our usual condition, beyond our ordinary mental condition of time and space, beyond our conventional categories of experience. “Primordial” means that something is originally so, it is fundamentally the case, but also that it is the case all the time, not only long ago. It is true that a long time ago, the two were one, but that oneness of long ago survives now as well. But it survives now primordially, meaning that it is in the origin of our experience.

Our experience right now has an origin, has a depth, has a source, but not in terms of time. That’s why I use the term “eternally,” which is the equivalent of “at this moment.” And “this moment” is beyond the time continuum, which means that it is the very now-ness of our experience.

I use words that sometimes are difficult to understand, such as “primordial” or “eternal”; but they have very specific, clear, definite meanings. “Eternally” doesn’t mean “a long time in the future.” It means “all time,” because it is the *now* of all time. It is the source of time, before we think of time; it is what is now. In that primordial place—the fundamental condition of our awareness that is beyond our history, beyond our thinking of time in terms of past and future—when we go to the essence of our consciousness (which we can know only right now, in the very moment of our being), it is possible to see and to experience that passion and selfless love are the same.

But there is a great deal of stuff in the way of knowing this. Many things in our mind, in our experience, stand in the way. One is the belief of many people on the spiritual path, who, as we have

seen, take these to be two separate forces, two opposite experiences: “I have a lot of conflict in my life because I want to be realized, I want to be free, and I don’t understand how this realm of wanting and desires, needs, passion, and intensity fits with that.” The erotic is but one of these manifestations of instinctual energy. “Divine eros” means that there is a pleasurable experience that has desire, wanting, and passion in it and, at the same time, is totally loving—it is completely love, selflessness, and purity.

What we want to do, then, is to unpack all of this and see: How are we going to experience it? How can we see that it is useful for us, not only for our lives, for our relationships—including our love relationships—but also for our spirituality, for our spiritual development? We want to be able to have some access, some openness, to this little-known dimension of our nature, of our spirit, of our true humanness.

THE PRACTICE OF INQUIRY

We are going to do an exercise now to begin to explore these two forces. A meditation is one kind of exercise or practice, but we do other kinds of exercises and practices that have to do with exploring your experience, looking into it, to find out more about it, to understand it. One of the main practices in the Diamond Approach—and one of the main practices that we will work with in this teaching—what we call inquiry: You look into your experience and you find what your experience is—which means your sensations, your feelings, your thoughts, your emotions, your memories, and so on. To explore your experience, you need to be aware of it, you need to feel it, be in touch with it, experiencing it as immediately as possible.

Inquiry means that we learn to be spiritual not by pushing away our ordinary experience but by embracing and feeling it more completely than we usually do. In fact, being spiritual *includes* experiencing ourselves and being in touch with our experience as completely as possible because, generally speaking, most of us don’t experience ourselves completely. There are limitations and restrictions, on how we normally experience things and how we experience ourselves, including our thoughts, emotions, sensations, tendencies, desires. If we experience all of these fully, and if we really understand them, then we will see that they are the manifestations of our spiritual nature. They themselves will take us across the great divide; they themselves will become windows and entryways into the primordial ground, into eternity.

In our orientation here, we do not throw away anything, we do not push away anything, and we do not try to get rid of anything. We always embrace our experience completely, as completely as possible. Inquiry means being aware of our experience, being present in it, feeling it as completely as possible, and at the same time having a curious mind about it. To inquire is to be interested in not only asking “What am I experiencing?” but also wanting to know “What does it mean? What is it about? Why do I feel this way? What makes me experience this feeling or this emotion or this sensation, these thoughts? Why am I thinking that way?”

By asking ourselves questions, by exploring, by looking at our experience with a curious questioning mind and an inquiring attitude, it is possible for our experience to begin to open up and show its meaning, to reveal more parts of itself. It becomes possible for us to begin to understand what is happening: “Oh, I see now. It is somewhat difficult for me to be present here, to feel my bell because I’m still not fully finished with the last conversation with my girlfriend. I didn’t tell her everything that I wanted to tell her. And now I realize that is why I am still not settled—I haven’t said what I really felt. I didn’t tell her that I want to marry her. So of course, it is difficult for me to be present.” This is a pleasant example, but there are many other examples, some not so nice.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to be present, or difficult for us to feel what we are feeling, because there might be fear. “I don’t want to fully feel my belly because if I feel it, I will see how scared I am . . . and I am scared because it’s possible that I might be losing my job.” When you recognize that you are a little agitated because you are scared that you might lose your job, we call that understanding. But that understanding is not just thoughts in your mind; it includes the totality of your experience. As you come to understand the fullness of what you are experiencing, you calm down and you feel a different kind of state. The understanding brings more light, more clarity, more illumination to the experience, and that naturally changes it. It is transformed.

So instead of feeling, “I am scared, and it’s because I might lose my job,” you now start feeling that you are really angry: “Why are they going to fire *me*? I have been doing such a good job!” So things proceed from feeling agitated to feeling afraid to feeling angry. There is nothing unusual about this progression, but if we are not aware of it, if we don’t understand the relationship between all of the feelings, we tend to be unsettled inside. That is because we are not fully in touch with our experience.

In this example, our understanding can go further. “Why am I angry? Yes, I’ve been doing a good job, but I’m angry that they are going to fire some people and I am going to be one of them.” You might start remembering that your father was never happy with your grades in school. When you brought your report card home, maybe there was one B+ on it, and he would always say, “You can do better than that. Next time, bring home all As.” And you realize that you are carrying a deep disappointment inside that has a personal history. Because your father didn’t recognize that you were doing a good job, and because whatever you did was never enough for him, then whenever there is the slightest indication—even decades later—that somebody is not recognizing your good work, you believe that they are going to be disappointed in you, or even that they are not going to like you.

If you go further and explore the question “Why do I care whether or not my father sees what I’m doing?” you could begin to feel after a while, “Because he is my father. I love him and it was so important that he love me.” And if you allow that recognition, you might start feeling love—again before you know it you turn into a pink rose. “That’s interesting—I’m a pink rose . . . smells very nice.” And all these petals are opening and unfolding.

So what started out as an irritation ended in a spiritual experience. That is actually how our consciousness works. If you understand it, it opens up. If you don’t understand it, it stays the same.

We want to do an exercise now, an inquiry that is based on this principle of open and curious exploration. When you are doing an inquiry on any topic, alone or with others, you might find certain tendencies within yourself—for example, you could think that there is something wrong with you, you may want to find fault with yourself or feel bad about yourself. It is important that you look into your experience not from the perspective of thinking that it is good or bad, nor from the perspective of judging it or criticizing yourself, nor from the perspective of finding fault with your experience. You simply want to understand it. You want to discover the truth that is in it. If you find yourself with these tendencies, just become aware of them and include them in the inquiry, without getting identified with them. Be more of an explorer. You are not to be a judge. You really just want to find it out.

When you do a practice with others and a discussion at the end is suggested, as much as possible you want to have that same attitude of being open and exploring together. You want to be as mature and open as you can, both with yourself and with others. If everyone takes the attitude of genuinely wanting to explore, of really loving discovering what the truth is and wanting understanding, it is easier to deal with those tendencies.

This exploration will help reveal how you experience the opposition or conflict between the selfless giving of love and the passionate wanting, the two forces discussed earlier. Spend fifteen to twenty minutes considering these questions. If you are doing this exercise alone, you may want to write the down in a journal and respond in writing.

1. How do you experience the selfless giving of love?
2. How do you experience passionate wanting?
3. How do you experience the relationship of the two in your life, in your experience?
4. How do you experience the opposition, the conflict, or the disharmony between the sweet, giving, “spiritual” love on the one hand, and the wanting, the desire, the passion and intensity on the other?

If you are doing the practice with others, you can take turns asking one another these questions and being present for each other as the responses arise. After everyone has finished responding, have a discussion to see what you have discovered. What were the commonalities and differences? Exploring what came up for each person and what the common threads were can give you a deeper perception about this issue, adding more insight, more illumination, to your experience.

This is an emotional exploration, a felt exploration, not an intellectual one. You are not offering theories about the opposition of these forces. You are remembering and describing your actual feelings: “I feel this way . . . I feel that way . . .” You can look into any part of your life, but as you explore those feelings, you might move from incidents or feelings from the past into more of how it is in the present moment. As you see the patterns in your life that relate to conflict or opposition between these two forces, you will begin to be aware of things in the moment that you can include in your inquiry.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Student: In the inquiry, I had three things that I wanted to talk about: my desire, love, and passion. I am quite puzzled about how I can integrate them.

Hameed: You had three, so it is more complicated. I guess some people had more than two. I was trying to make it simple, but I guess life is complicated like that; we do find such complexity in our experience. Usually in spiritual teachings, passion is put together with desire, in the sense that it is a passionate desire rather than only passion by itself. However, in reality, passion can be with desire or with love. Passion is a quality on its own. It is good that you saw that. The polarity that we are trying to work with is the selfless, giving kind of love—which most people think is not passionate—and desire and wanting, which can become passionate. You might find that the passion becomes fuller at either end. That is a good insight.

Student: You were elaborating about the meaning of the word “divine,” and I found that very interesting. I also have a lot of associations with the word “eros.” I get that it’s “eros” as in “erotic” and I was wondering where the word “erotic” came from, because that has many associations, too.

Hameed: I haven’t discussed that yet, but we will. We definitely will explore the various associations and the meaning of “eros.” That is what I was saying: We are putting “divine” and “eros” together, and usually people don’t do that. So we want to see *how* can we put these two together. We discussed in some sense the wanting, the desire, and the pleasure that goes with desire, and the active

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